NEW

# CUBAN REVOLUTION

## THE TRUE STORY OF THE REVOLUTION THAT SHOOK THE WORLD

INSIDE THE
**EXPLOSIVE**
CUBAN MISSILE
CRISIS

From the makers of
ALL ABOUT HISTORY

Digital Edition

THIRD EDITION

CHE: MARTYR OR MURDERER ★ WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTION ★ FIDEL: RISE OF A REBEL

# CUBAN REVOLUTION

Revolt and rebellion run in Cuba's blood thanks to the Caribbean island's history of conflict, foreign rule and political upheaval. In July 1953, a young, Marxist revolutionary by the name of Fidel Castro launched an audacious bid to throw off the shackles of corrupt dictator Fulgencio Batista. It would end in Castro's arrest and subsequently his self-imposed exile in Mexico - but he would return. Three years later Castro set sail for Cuba with Che Guevara and 80 other rebels. With the support of the general population and using guerrilla tactics in the island's mountains, they gradually gained the upper hand over Batista and his army. Batista fled the country on 1 January 1959, with Castro entering the capital Havana a week later to a hero's welcome. He would rule the nation, first as prime minister then as president, for almost half a century.

Inside we explore the fascinating story of the revolution that shook the world, from its origins and early days to key events and iconic personalities from the conflict. We'll also look at how the revolution shaped Cuba in the decades that followed, from the Cold War to the collapse of communism and into the 21st century.

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# CUBAN REVOLUTION

**Future PLC** Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

**Editorial**
Editor **Dan Peel**
Designer **Thomas Parrett**
Compiled by **Alice Barnes-Brown**
Editorial Director **Jon White**
Senior Art Editor **Andy Downes**

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**Photography**
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**Advertising**
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**
clare.dove@futurenet.com

**International**
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
licensing@futurenet.com

**Circulation**
Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

**Production**
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Clare Scott**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Managers **Keely Miller, Nola Cokely,**
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Commercial Finance Director **Dan Jotcham**
Head of Art & Design **Greg Whitaker**

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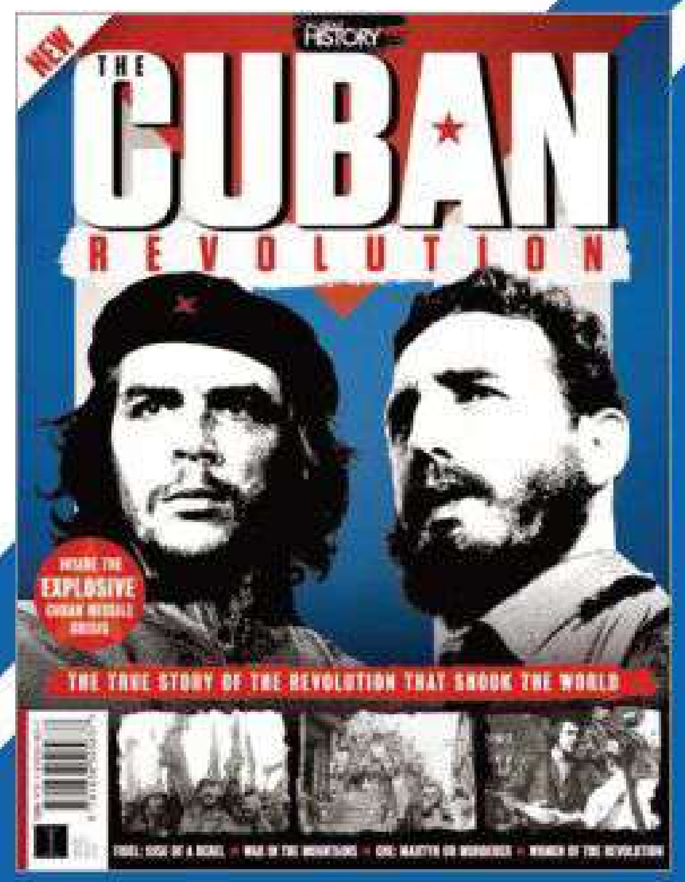

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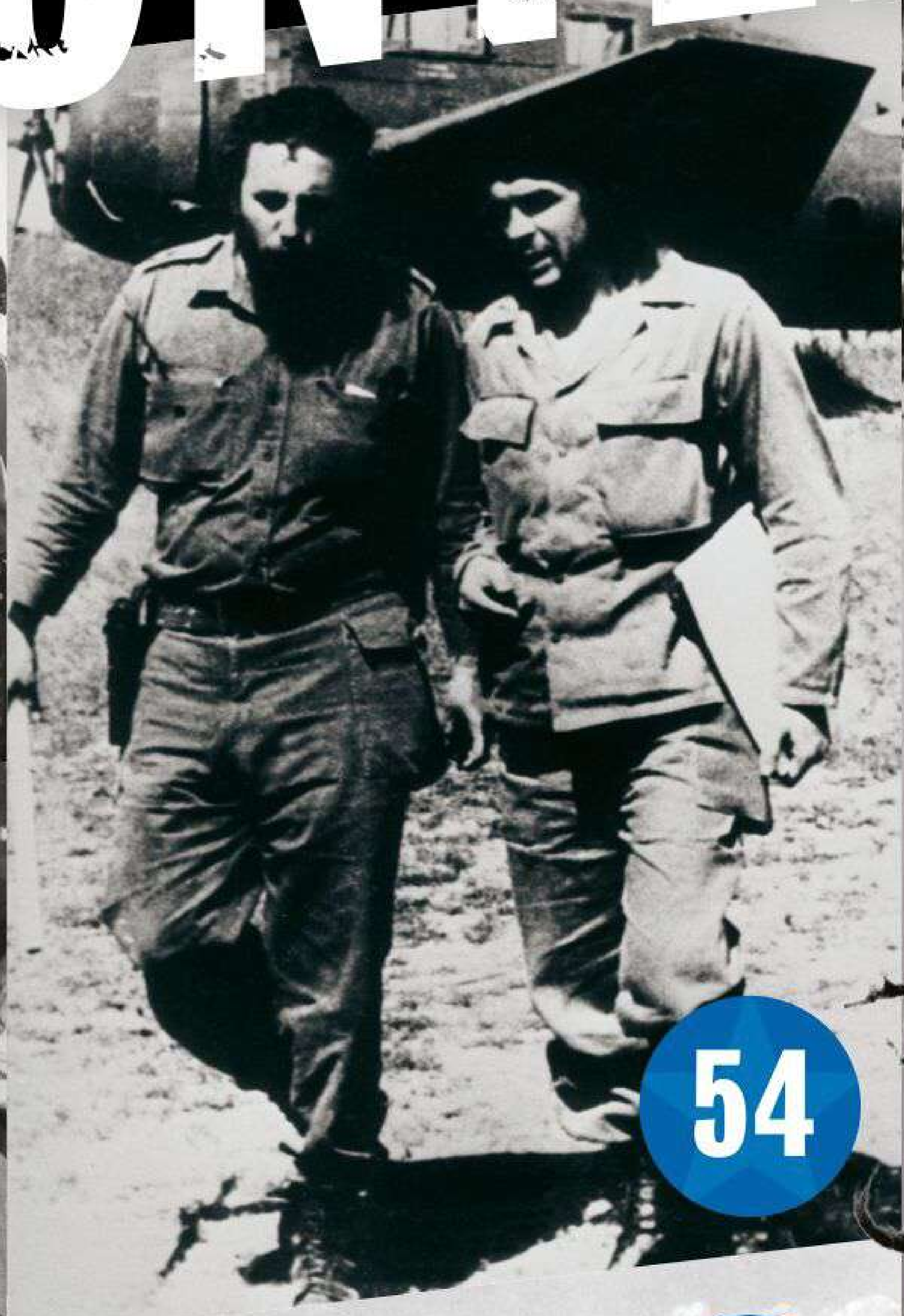

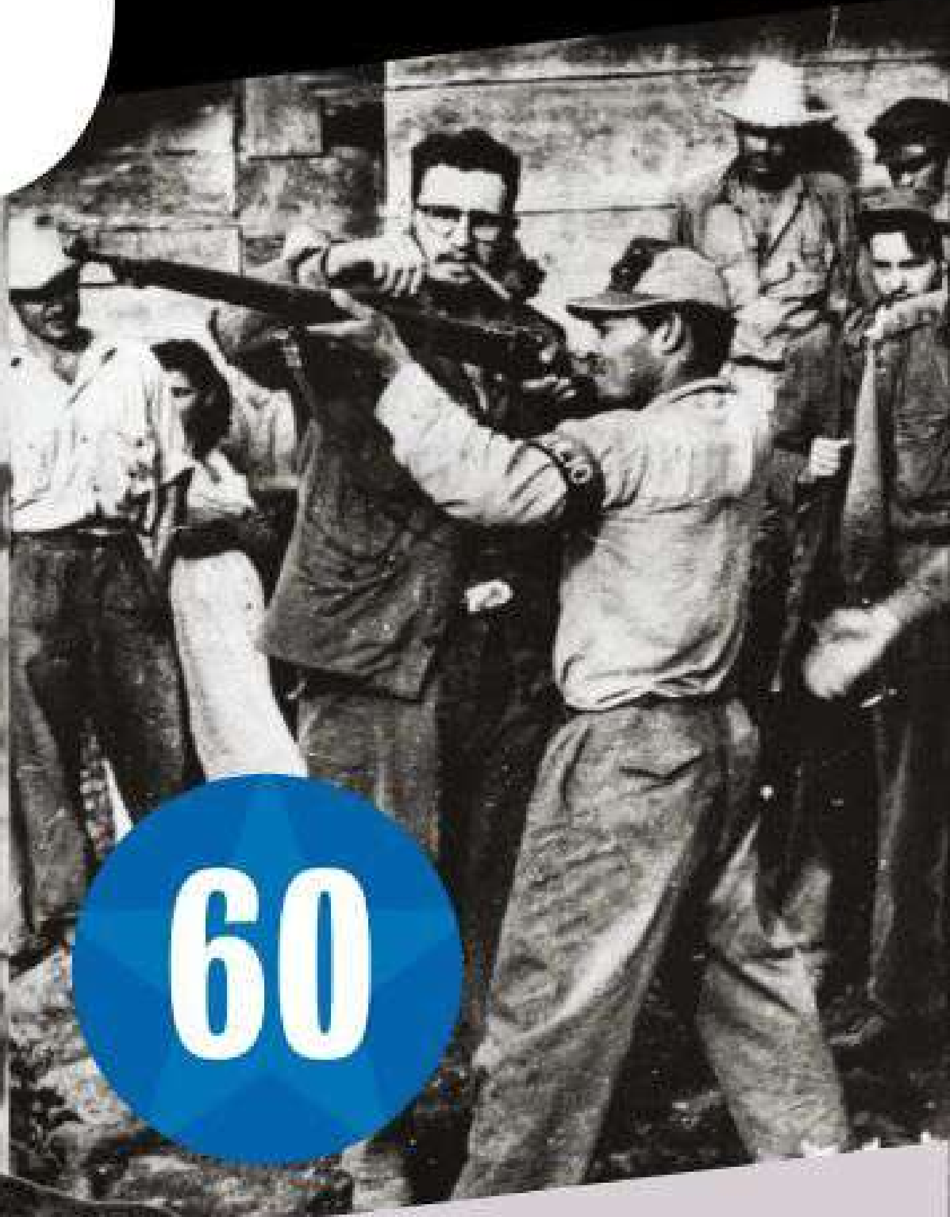

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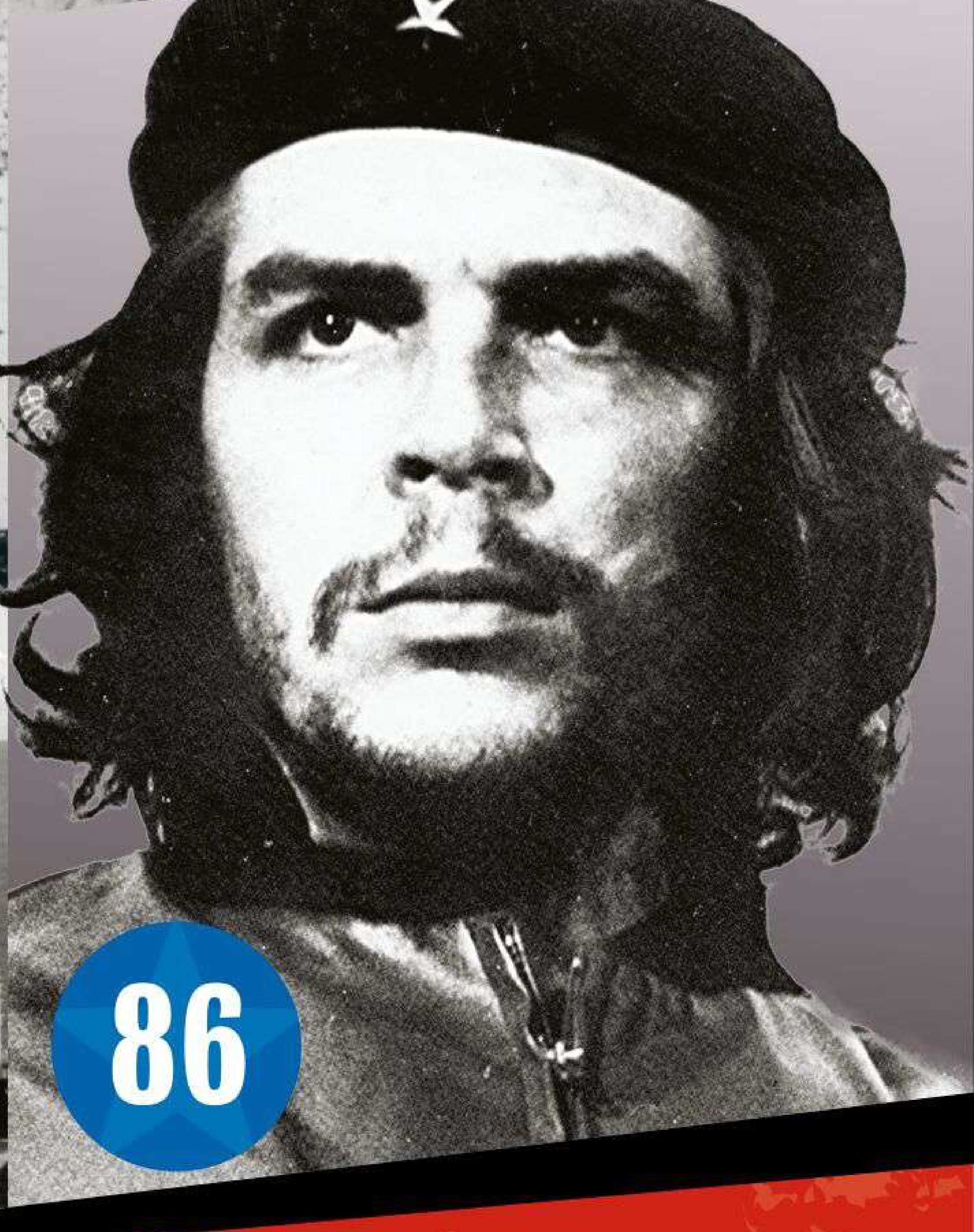

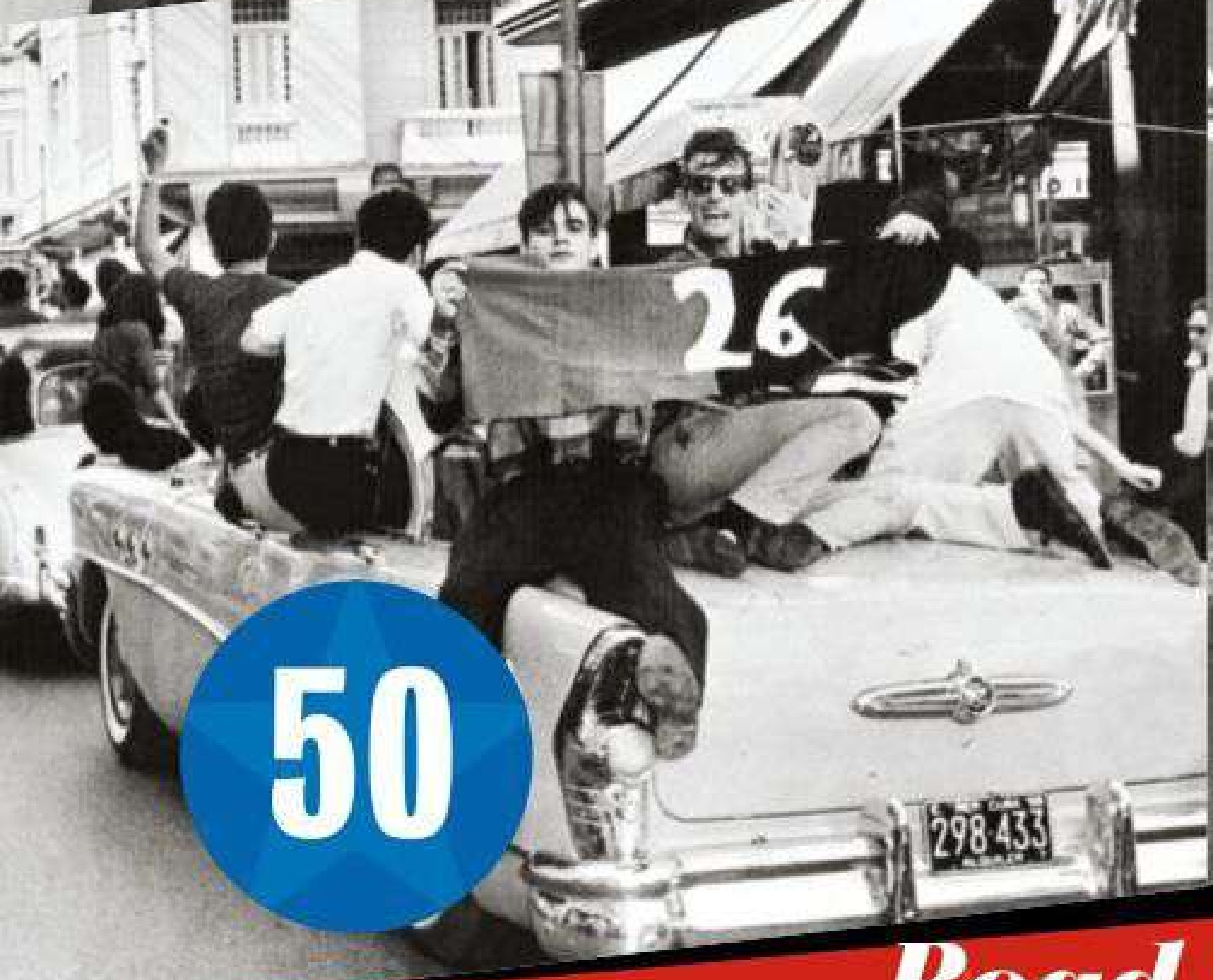
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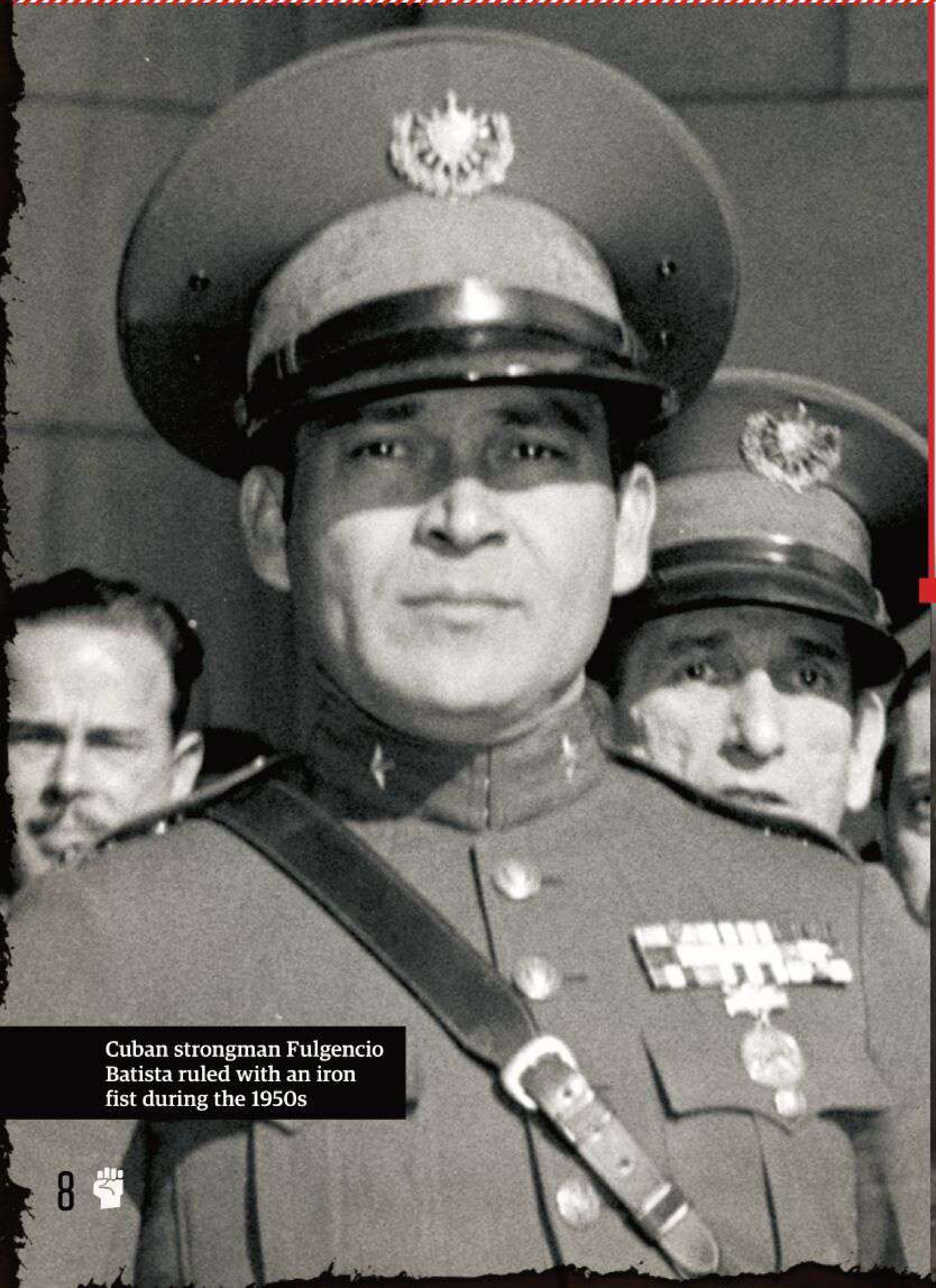
# THE TIMELINE FOR CASTRO's REVOLUTION

Uncover the relentless road to Marxist revolution and seizure of power in Cuba that stretched across the 1950s

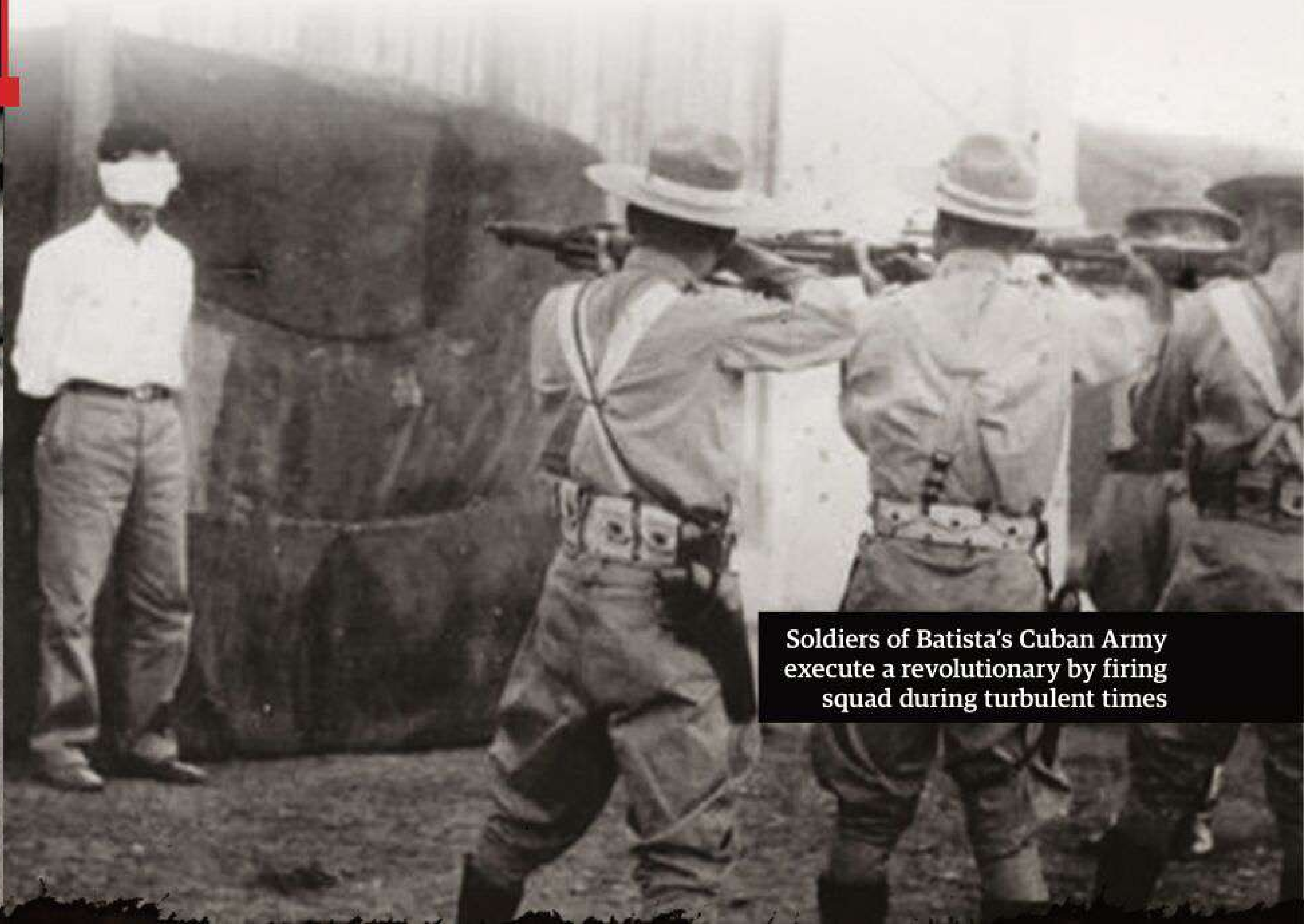
## BATISTA SEIZES POWER

**10 March 1952, Havana**

Military leader Fulgencio Batista seizes power in Cuba and suspends elections planned for later in the year. Batista had previously risen to prominence during the 1933 Revolt of the Sergeants and served as president of the country from 1940 to 1944. He has lived in Florida and returns to Cuba in 1952 intent on running for president once again. Facing incumbent Carlos Prío Socarrás and the prospect of defeat at the polls, he incites a military coup, deposing Socarrás and establishing a corrupt dictatorship, profiting from relationships with foreign business interests and even organised crime. With US financial, military and economic backing, Batista suspends the Constitution of 1940 and initiates a repressive regime, censoring the press, imprisoning dissenters and widening the gap between the poor and wealthy. In response, revolts threaten the government's stability. Notable among these is the 26th of July Movement led by Marxist Fidel Castro.



Cuban strongman Fulgencio Batista ruled with an iron fist during the 1950s



Soldiers of Batista's Cuban Army execute a revolutionary by firing squad during turbulent times

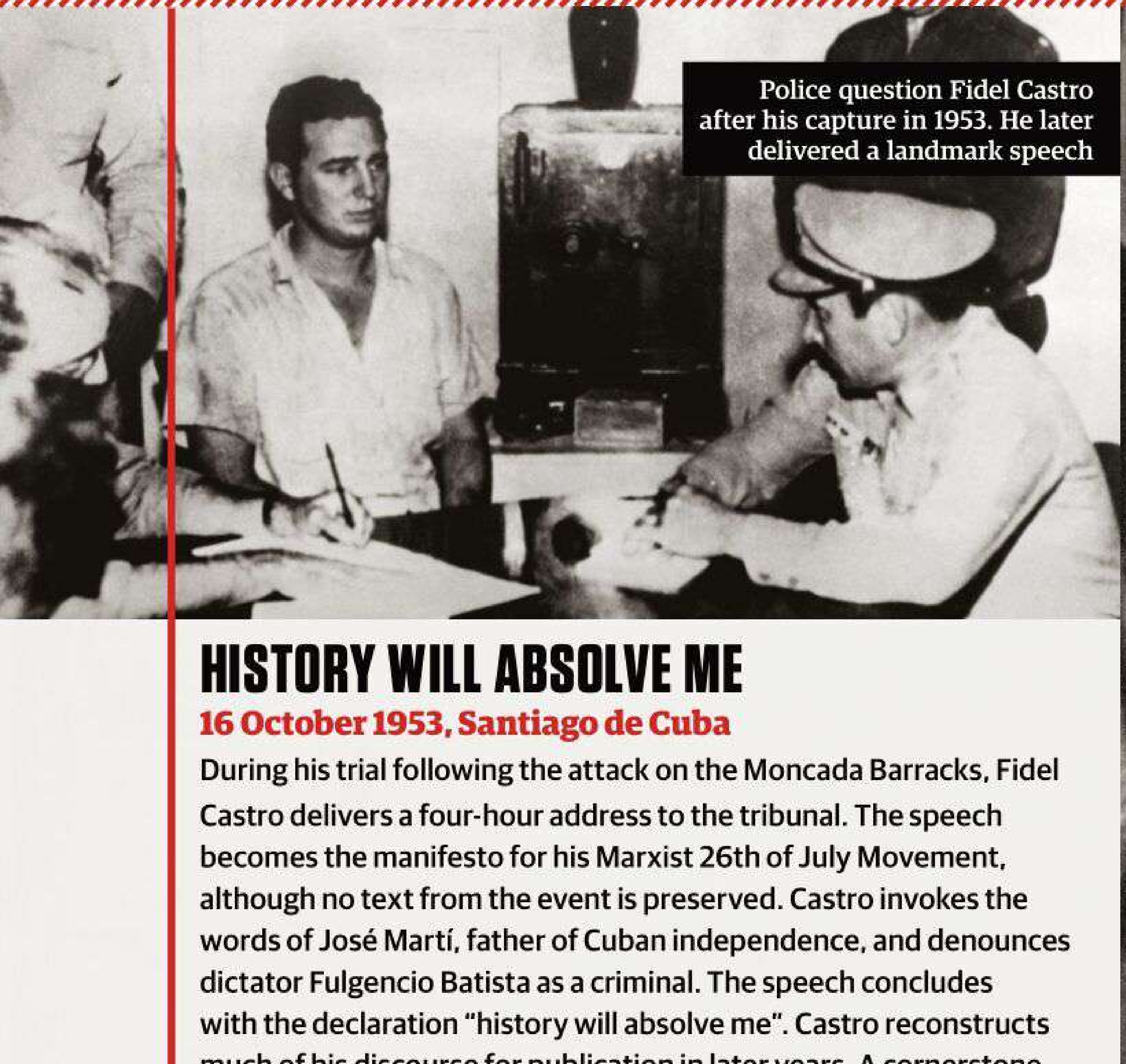
# *The timeline for Castro's revolution*

## CASTRO ATTACKS MONCADA MILITARY BASE

**26 July 1953, Santiago de Cuba**

Marxist revolutionary Fidel Castro leads an ill-trained band of 160 rebels in an abortive attack against the Cuban Army installation at Moncada Barracks, near Santiago de Cuba, the island nation's second-largest city. At least 60 of Castro's followers are killed in the fight, along with 15 soldiers and three police officers. Castro flees into the surrounding jungle but is arrested a short time later. He is tried separately from other conspirators and lies under oath in an attempt to avoid implicating other revolutionaries. Among those receiving 13-year prison sentences is his brother, Raúl. Fidel Castro receives a prison sentence of 15 years.

The assault on Moncada Barracks is widely considered the beginning of the Cuban Revolution



Police question Fidel Castro after his capture in 1953. He later delivered a landmark speech

## HISTORY WILL ABSOLVE ME

**16 October 1953, Santiago de Cuba**

During his trial following the attack on the Moncada Barracks, Fidel Castro delivers a four-hour address to the tribunal. The speech becomes the manifesto for his Marxist 26th of July Movement, although no text from the event is preserved. Castro invokes the words of José Martí, father of Cuban independence, and denounces dictator Fulgencio Batista as a criminal. The speech concludes with the declaration "history will absolve me". Castro reconstructs much of his discourse for publication in later years. A cornerstone of the address is his description of five revolutionary laws, which he intends to enact once Cuba is free of Batista. They include: reinstatement of the Constitution of 1940; reform of land ownership and use rights; the right of industrial workers to a 30 per cent share of company profits; the right of sugar workers to receive 55 per cent of company profits; and the confiscation of assets belonging to individuals convicted of fraud under prior governments.

## BATISTA OUTLAWS CUBAN COMMUNIST PARTY

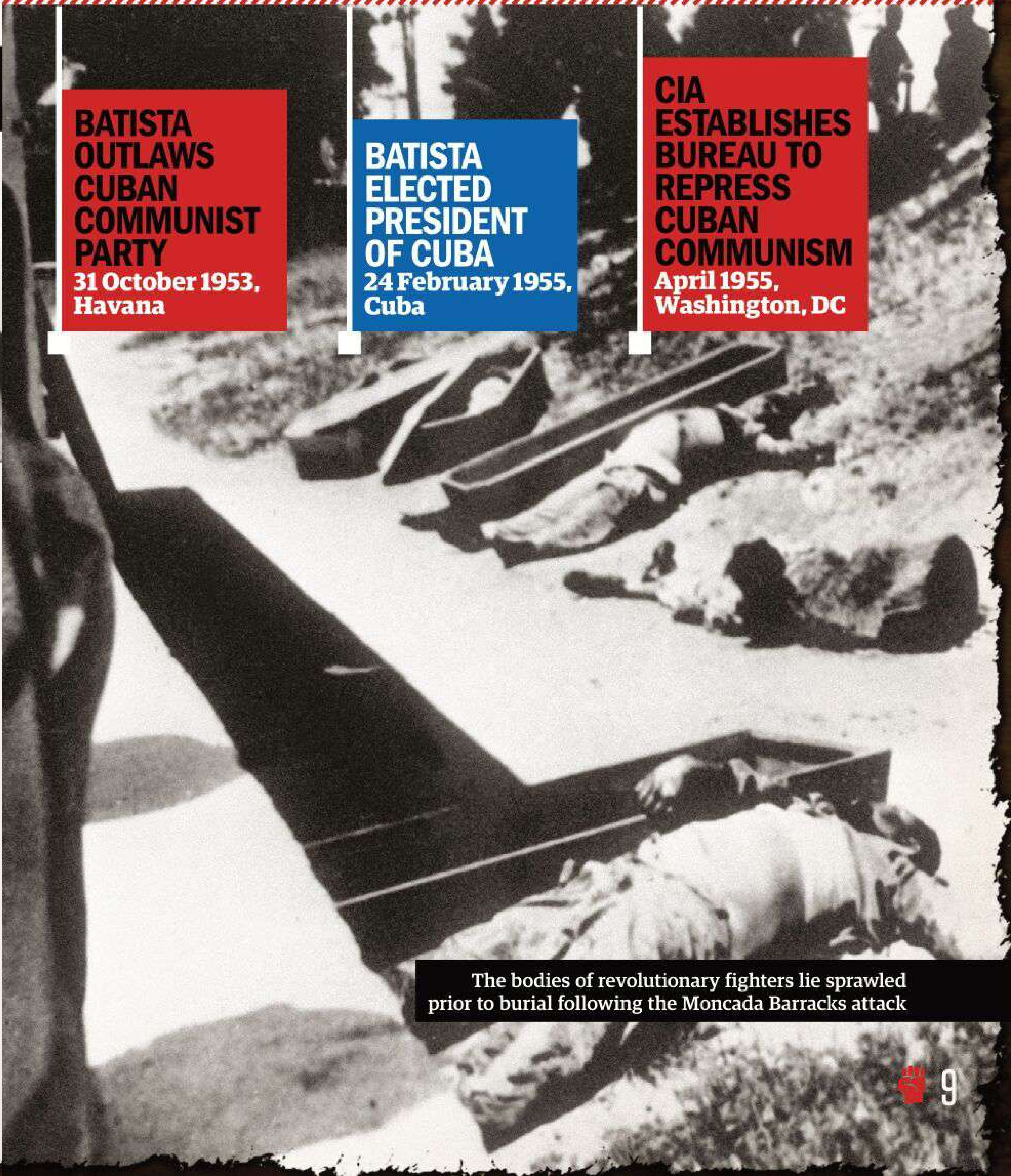
**31 October 1953, Havana**

## BATISTA ELECTED PRESIDENT OF CUBA

**24 February 1955, Cuba**

## CIA ESTABLISHES BUREAU TO REPRESS CUBAN COMMUNISM

**April 1955, Washington, DC**



The bodies of revolutionary fighters lie sprawled prior to burial following the Moncada Barracks attack

## AMNESTY AND EXPATRIATION

**15 May 1955, Isle of Pines**

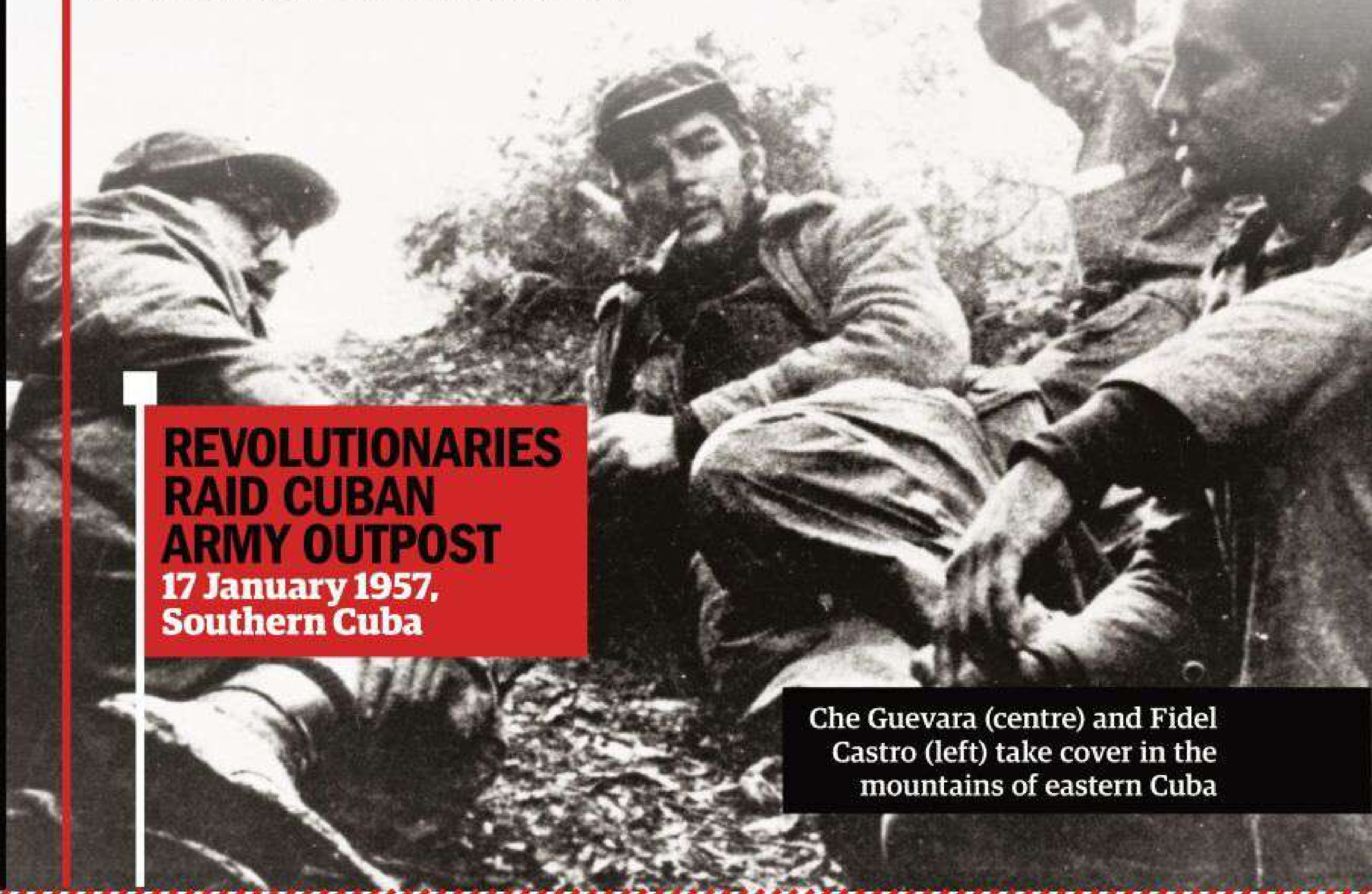
Batista grants a general amnesty for political prisoners, and brothers Fidel and Raúl Castro are freed from prison after serving nearly two years. They flee to Mexico and are introduced to Argentine physician and Marxist revolutionary Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. The men spend ten hours discussing political theory, tactics and aspirations. Together they appeal to a large number of Cuban exiles who have fled the island nation's repressive regime and organise a new military movement with the intent to seize power.

Fidel Castro (left) and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara discuss plans for their successful revolution in Cuba

## AMBUSH TAKES ITS TOLL

**5 December 1956, Jungle near Sierra Maestra Mountains**

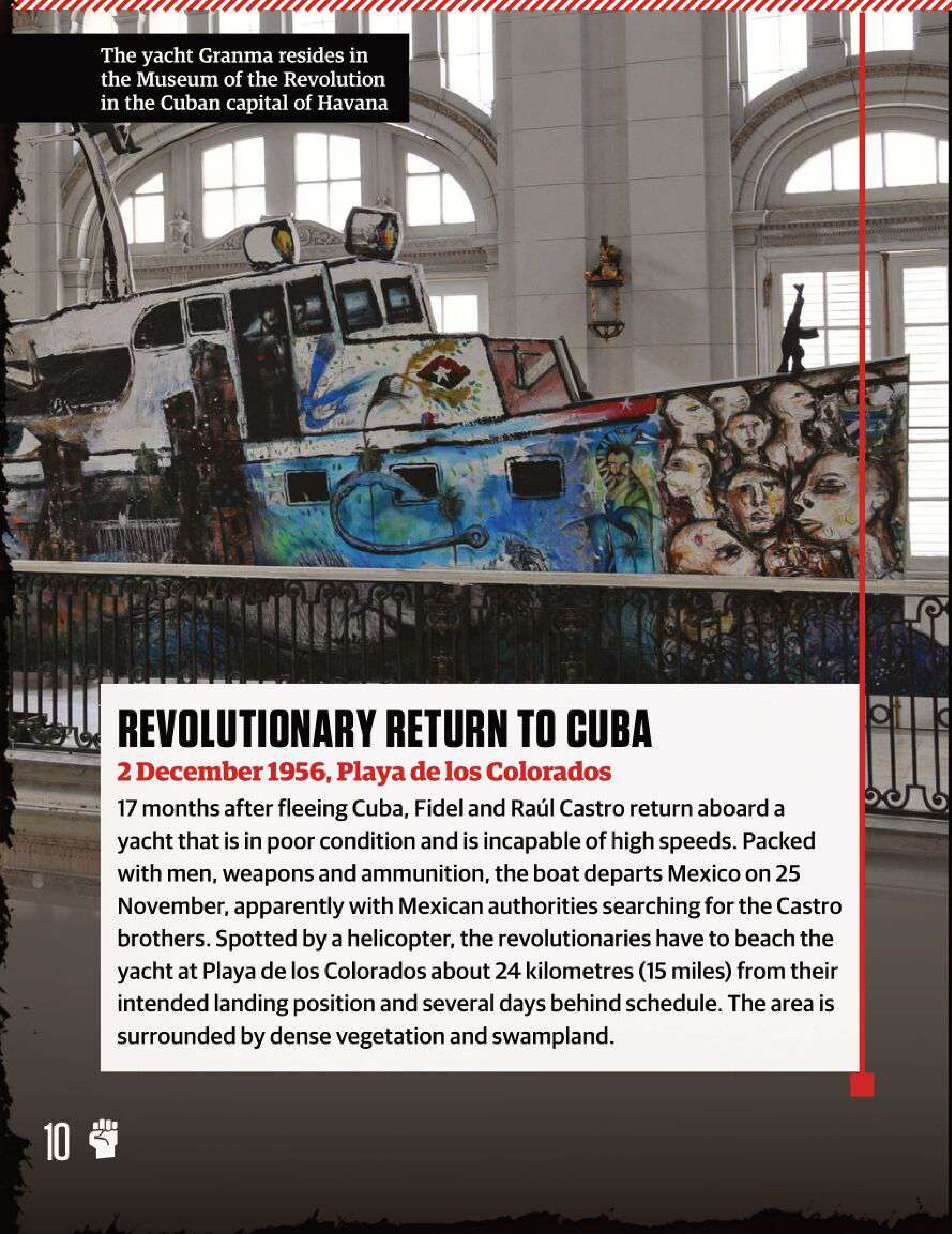
Three days after coming ashore in eastern Cuba, the Castro brothers and Che Guevara lead their band of 80 revolutionaries towards the mountains of the Sierra Maestra, and they receive food and water from the peasant population. Betrayed by their guide, they are ambushed by government troops at Alegría de Pío. Sustaining heavy casualties, the rebels are forced to scatter. For the next 11 days, they evade capture. They reunite in the Sierra Maestra on 18 December, but only 12 of their original number, including the Castro brothers and Guevara, remain.



Che Guevara (centre) and Fidel Castro (left) take cover in the mountains of eastern Cuba

### REVOLUTIONARIES RAID CUBAN ARMY OUTPOST

**17 January 1957, Southern Cuba**

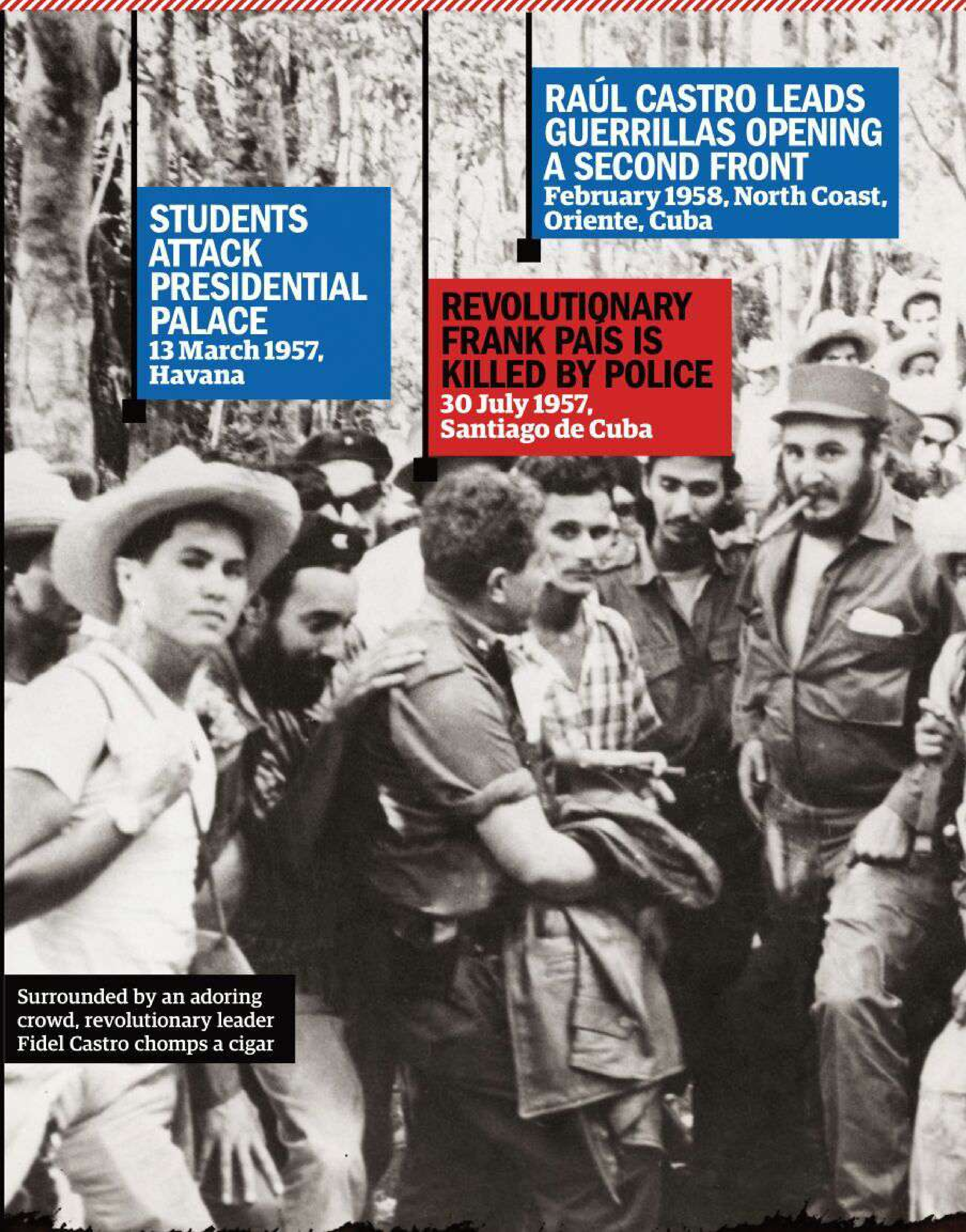


The yacht Granma resides in the Museum of the Revolution in the Cuban capital of Havana

## REVOLUTIONARY RETURN TO CUBA

**2 December 1956, Playa de los Colorados**

17 months after fleeing Cuba, Fidel and Raúl Castro return aboard a yacht that is in poor condition and is incapable of high speeds. Packed with men, weapons and ammunition, the boat departs Mexico on 25 November, apparently with Mexican authorities searching for the Castro brothers. Spotted by a helicopter, the revolutionaries have to beach the yacht at Playa de los Colorados about 24 kilometres (15 miles) from their intended landing position and several days behind schedule. The area is surrounded by dense vegetation and swampland.



### STUDENTS ATTACK PRESIDENTIAL PALACE

**13 March 1957, Havana**

### REVOLUTIONARY FRANK PAIS IS KILLED BY POLICE

**30 July 1957, Santiago de Cuba**

### RAÚL CASTRO LEADS GUERRILLAS OPENING A SECOND FRONT

**February 1958, North Coast, Oriente, Cuba**

Surrounded by an adoring crowd, revolutionary leader Fidel Castro chomps a cigar

### FIDEL CASTRO CALLS FOR OPEN REBELLION

**17 March 1958, Mountains of Cuba**

### US WITHDRAWS MILITARY SUPPORT FOR BATISTA

**1958**

While American businesses are invested in Cuba, the US abandons its support of Batista, declining to provide further military assistance. For years, Cuba has been a hotspot for wealthy Americans, and by the end of 1958 it's estimated that US companies own nearly half the country's sugar production and virtually all its oil production, mining and mineral resources, with control of most of its imports.

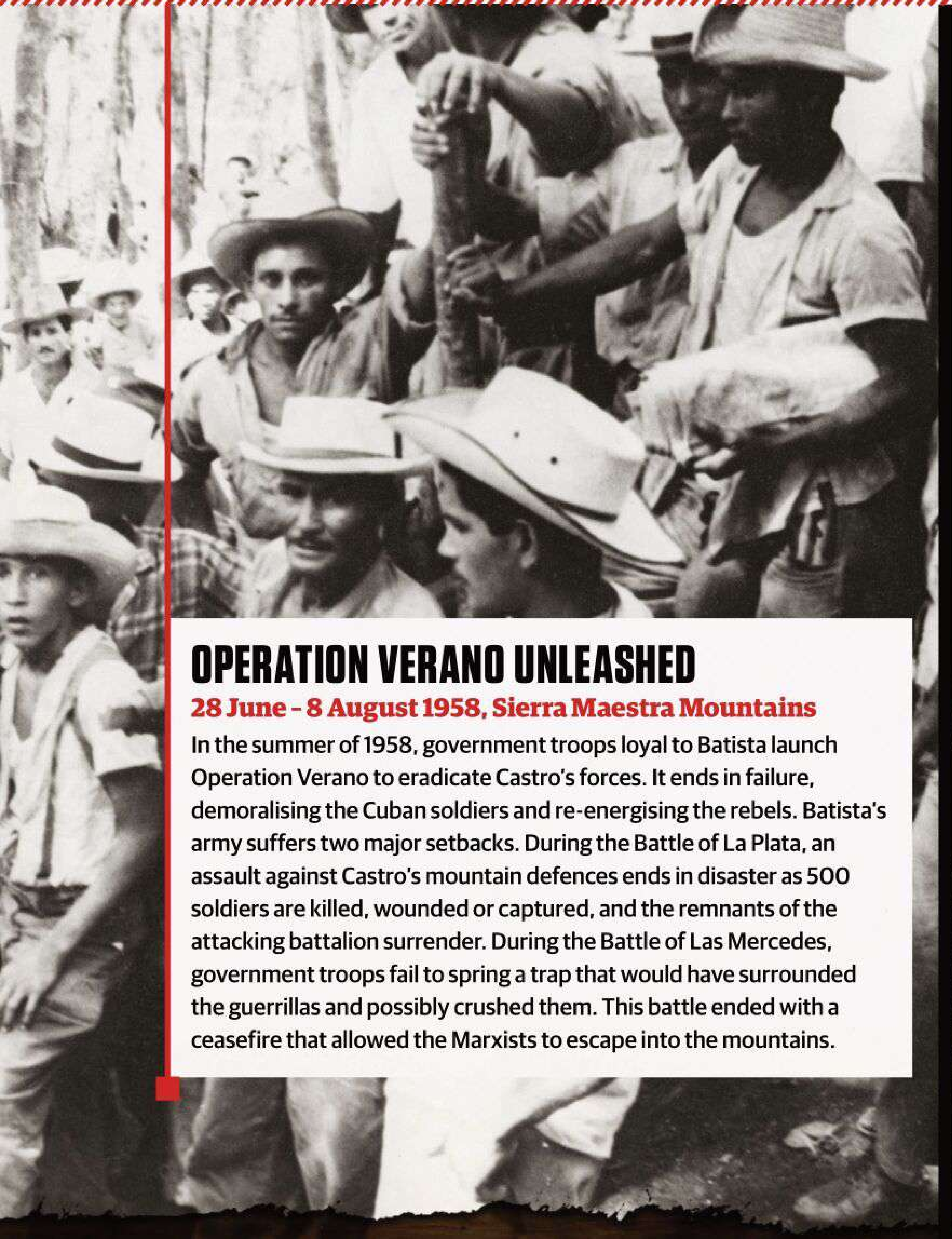
American tourists crowd a gambling table in Havana prior to the revolution

### GUEVARA VICTORIOUS AT SANTA CLARA SUPPORT

**28 December 1958 – 1 January 1959, Santa Clara, Cuba**

Leading a force of around 300 guerrillas, Che Guevara wins a victory at the Battle of Santa Clara. On 28 December, he leads his command from Caibarién, which falls a day later amid crowds that welcome the rebels. He sends a detachment to capture a key hill, its defenders supported by an armoured train. Utilising tractors from the local agricultural university, the rebels manage to derail the train, capturing arms and ammunition. The morale of the government troops wanes, and many of them desert. Within hours, the rebels control Santa Clara, and Batista flees the country. The road to Havana lies open.

Che Guevara, the victor at Santa Clara, stands in front of a tank on 1 January 1959



### OPERATION VERANO UNLEASHED

**28 June – 8 August 1958, Sierra Maestra Mountains**

In the summer of 1958, government troops loyal to Batista launch Operation Verano to eradicate Castro's forces. It ends in failure, demoralising the Cuban soldiers and re-energising the rebels. Batista's army suffers two major setbacks. During the Battle of La Plata, an assault against Castro's mountain defences ends in disaster as 500 soldiers are killed, wounded or captured, and the remnants of the attacking battalion surrender. During the Battle of Las Mercedes, government troops fail to spring a trap that would have surrounded the guerrillas and possibly crushed them. This battle ended with a ceasefire that allowed the Marxists to escape into the mountains.

### FIRST OF MANY CUBA-US AIRLINE HIJACKINGS

**1 November 1958, Miami, Florida**

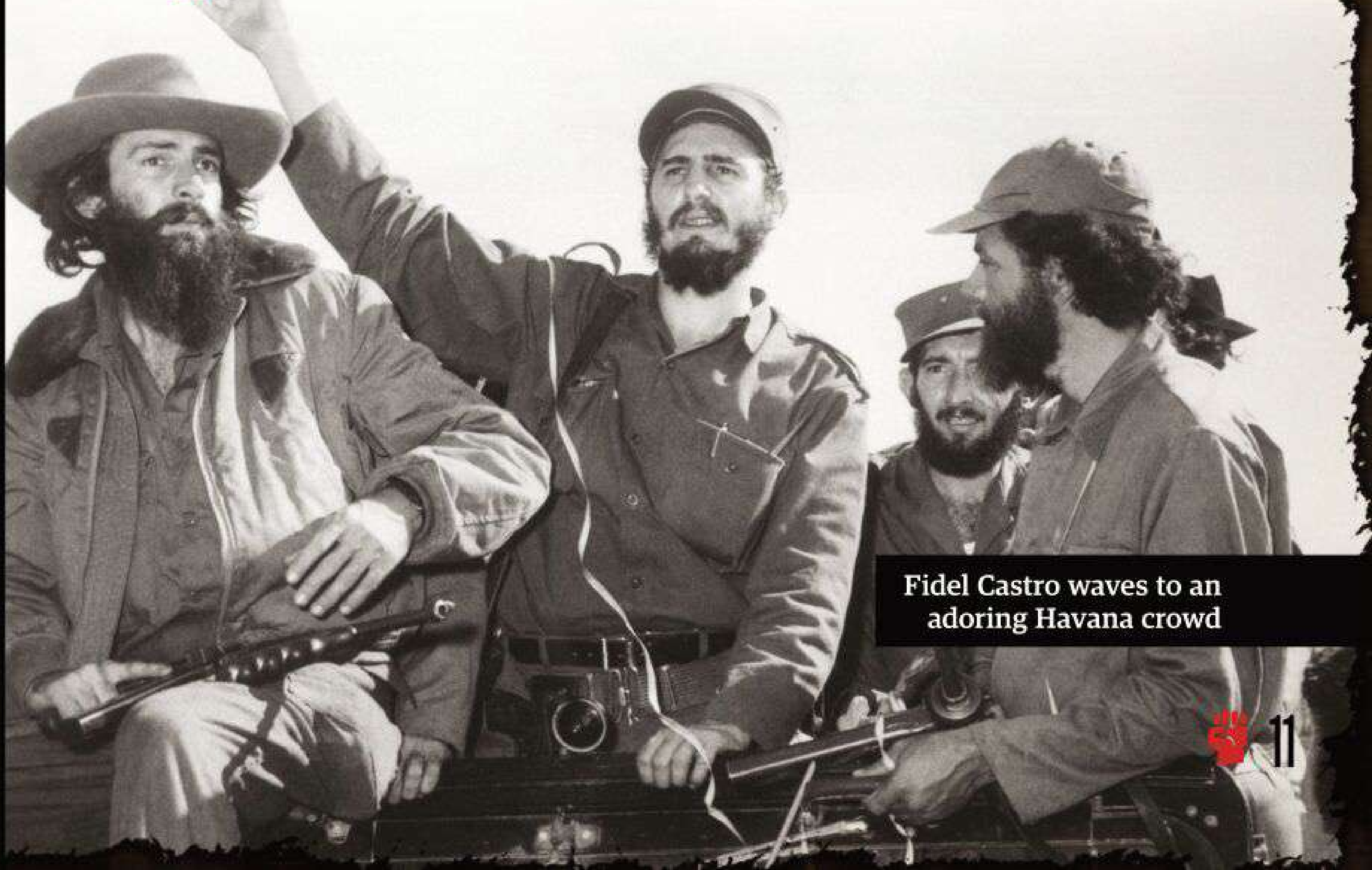
### FIDEL CASTRO BECOMES CUBAN PRIME MINISTER

**16 February 1959, Havana**

### CASTRO ENTERS HAVANA

**7 January 1959, Havana**

In Santiago de Cuba, Fidel Castro receives word of Guevara's victory at Santa Clara and Batista's flight from the country. He negotiates the surrender of Cuba's second-largest city, and the commander of its government garrison orders his troops not to resist. Castro then begins a long march north to Havana, which Guevara has already occupied after meeting no resistance. Castro enters the city, swiftly establishes political power, and names Judge Manuel Urrutia as provisional president.



Fidel Castro waves to an adoring Havana crowd

## CASTRO NATIONALISES AMERICAN INTERESTS

**6 August 1960, Havana**

As relations with the Soviet Union warm, Cuba becomes increasingly distant from the US. In July 1960, the US reduces Cuba's sugar quota, which is the market share allotted to Cuba in commerce. Castro urges the council of ministers to approve the Nationalisation Law, asserting Cuban ownership of property and other assets originally belonging to US companies and individuals. It's the end of an era of US public and private investment in Cuba.

## FIDEL CASTRO VISITS THE US

**April 1959, New York City**

## SOVIET DIPLOMATS VISIT CUBA

**February 1960, Havana**

Fidel Castro exchanges greetings with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in September 1960

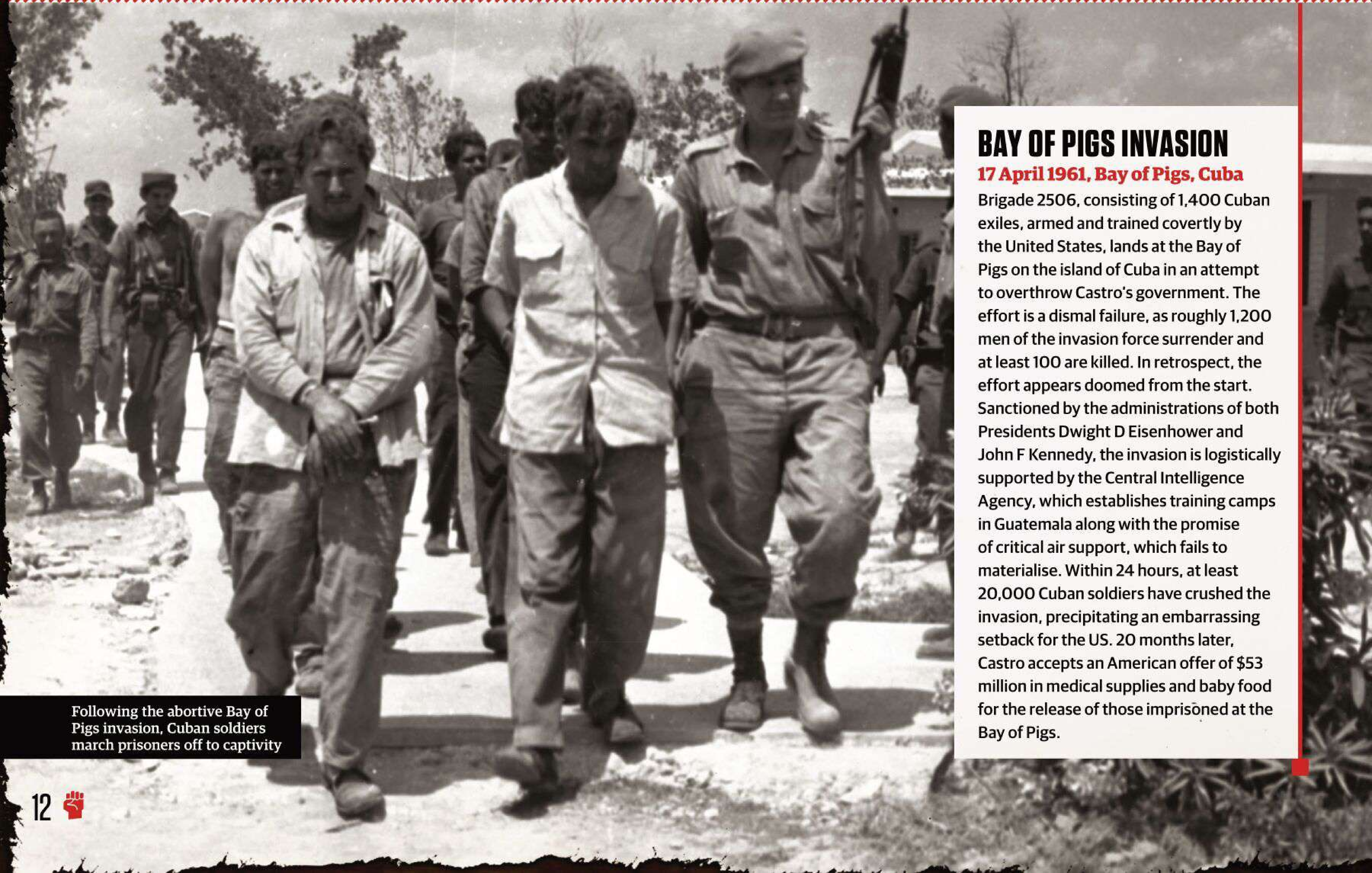
THE EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Officials and private citizens mill about outside the US embassy in Havana, which closed in 1961

## THE US BREAKS DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

**3 January 1961, Havana**

Amid worries that the existence of the Marxist Cuban state indicates the beginning of communist infiltration of the western hemisphere, the administration of President Dwight D Eisenhower closes the US embassy in Havana and formally severs diplomatic relations with Cuba. The US government claims that the immediate cause of the drastic diplomatic action is Castro's demand that the embassy staff be significantly reduced because he believes it is being used as a base for American spies. However, distrust of the Cuban regime has been building for months, particularly following the signing of a trade agreement with the Soviet Union in early 1960.



Following the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion, Cuban soldiers march prisoners off to captivity

## BAY OF PIGS INVASION

**17 April 1961, Bay of Pigs, Cuba**

Brigade 2506, consisting of 1,400 Cuban exiles, armed and trained covertly by the United States, lands at the Bay of Pigs on the island of Cuba in an attempt to overthrow Castro's government. The effort is a dismal failure, as roughly 1,200 men of the invasion force surrender and at least 100 are killed. In retrospect, the effort appears doomed from the start. Sanctioned by the administrations of both Presidents Dwight D Eisenhower and John F Kennedy, the invasion is logistically supported by the Central Intelligence Agency, which establishes training camps in Guatemala along with the promise of critical air support, which fails to materialise. Within 24 hours, at least 20,000 Cuban soldiers have crushed the invasion, precipitating an embarrassing setback for the US. 20 months later, Castro accepts an American offer of $53 million in medical supplies and baby food for the release of those imprisoned at the Bay of Pigs.

## CASTRO DECLARES HIMSELF MARXIST-LENINIST

**2 December 1961, Havana**

Confirming a belief long held by the US government, Fidel Castro, leader of the Cuban Revolution, takes to national television to proclaim that he is of the Marxist-Leninist political persuasion and that communism will be the defining force in Cuba's administration. "I am a Marxist-Leninist and shall be one until the end of my life," he states. "Marxism or scientific socialism has become the revolutionary movement of the working class." Castro's announcement seals the fate of Cold War-era relations with the United States, and Cuba moves more securely into the Soviet orbit, a bridgehead for communism in the western hemisphere.

Self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist Cuban leader Fidel Castro joins hands with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev

Fidel Castro prepares to lead Cuba towards a communist future

## CUBA EXPELLED FROM THE ORGANISATION OF AMERICAN STATES

**31 January 1962**

## US IMPOSES FULL TRADE EMBARGO ON CUBA

**7 February 1962**

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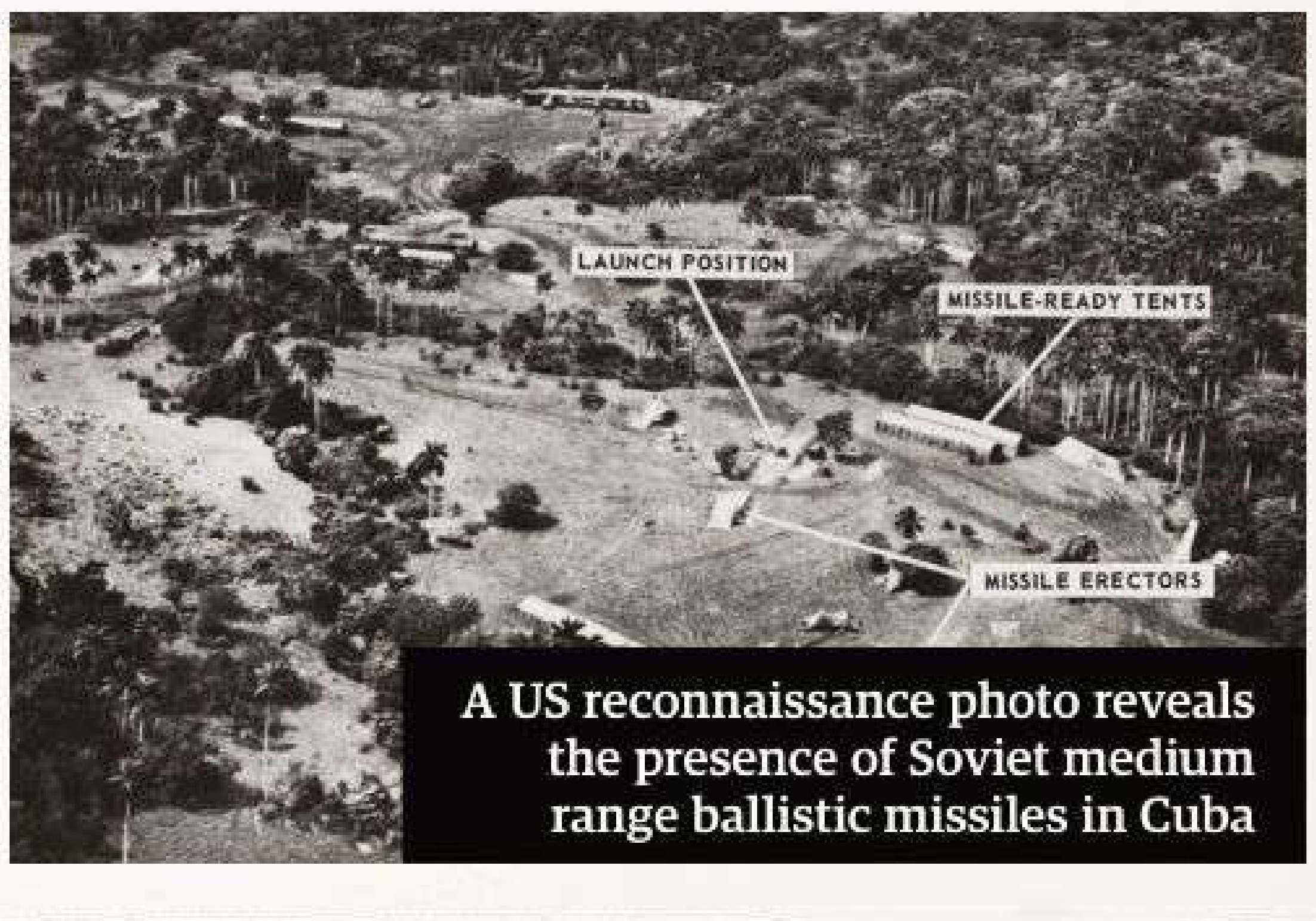
An American surveillance plane keeps close watch on a Soviet freighter during the Cuban Missile Crisis

## CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

**16-28 October 1962, Island of Cuba and Caribbean Sea**

During a 13-day standoff in autumn 1962, the US and the Soviet Union come to the brink of nuclear war following the discovery that Soviet ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear warheads are being erected in Cuba. The US initiates a naval blockade of the island and mobilises forces for a confrontation. The Soviets do the same and threaten to retaliate immediately if the US stages an invasion of Cuba. In a televised address on 22 October, President Kennedy discloses the existence of the missiles in Cuba to the American people and outlines his rationale for the blockade. Days of tense negotiations finally resolve the standoff. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev agrees to dismantle the missiles in exchange for a US pledge not to invade Cuba. The United States secretly agrees to remove ballistic missiles from Turkey.



A US reconnaissance photo reveals the presence of Soviet medium range ballistic missiles in Cuba

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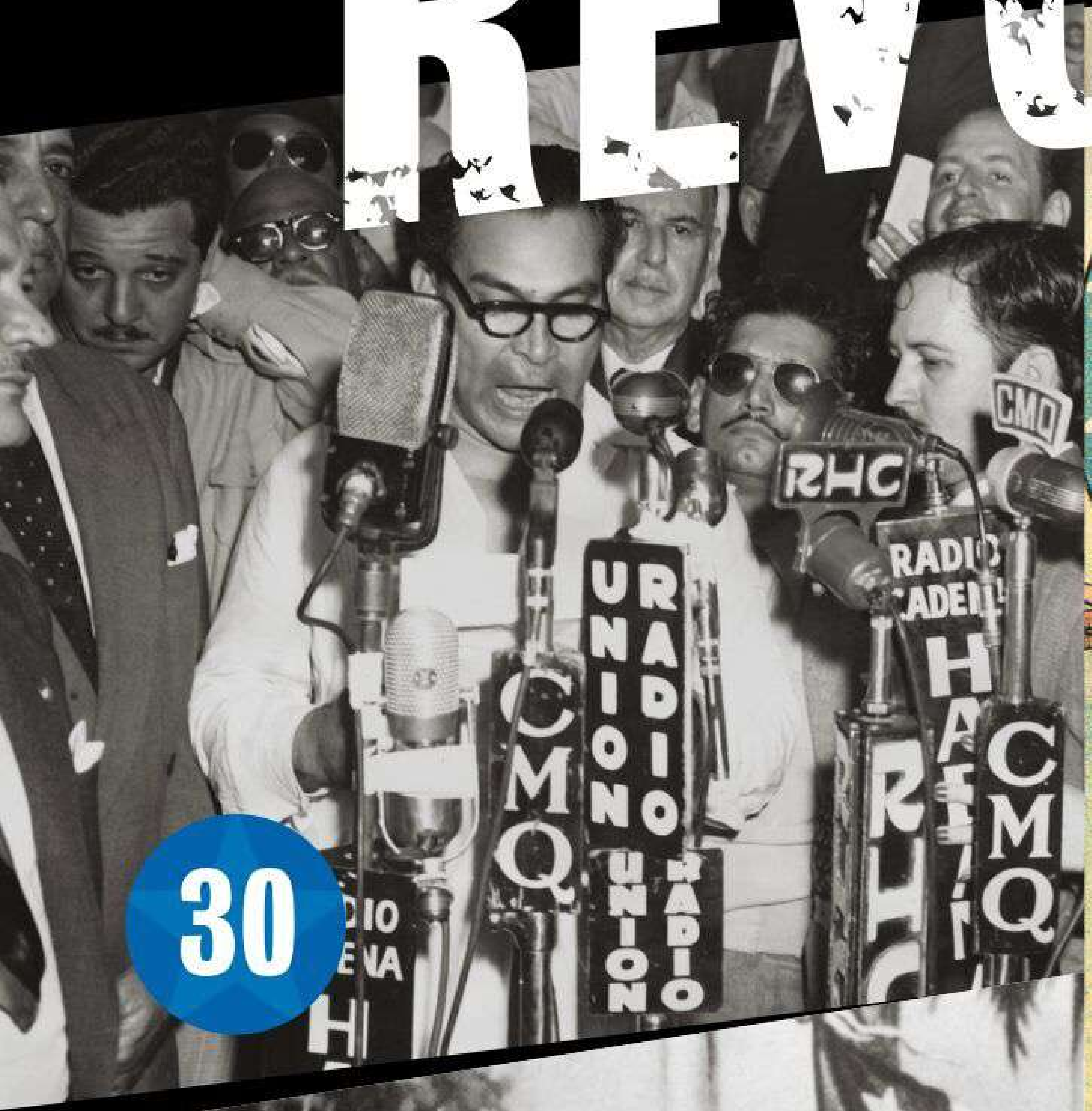
# ROAD TO REVOLUTION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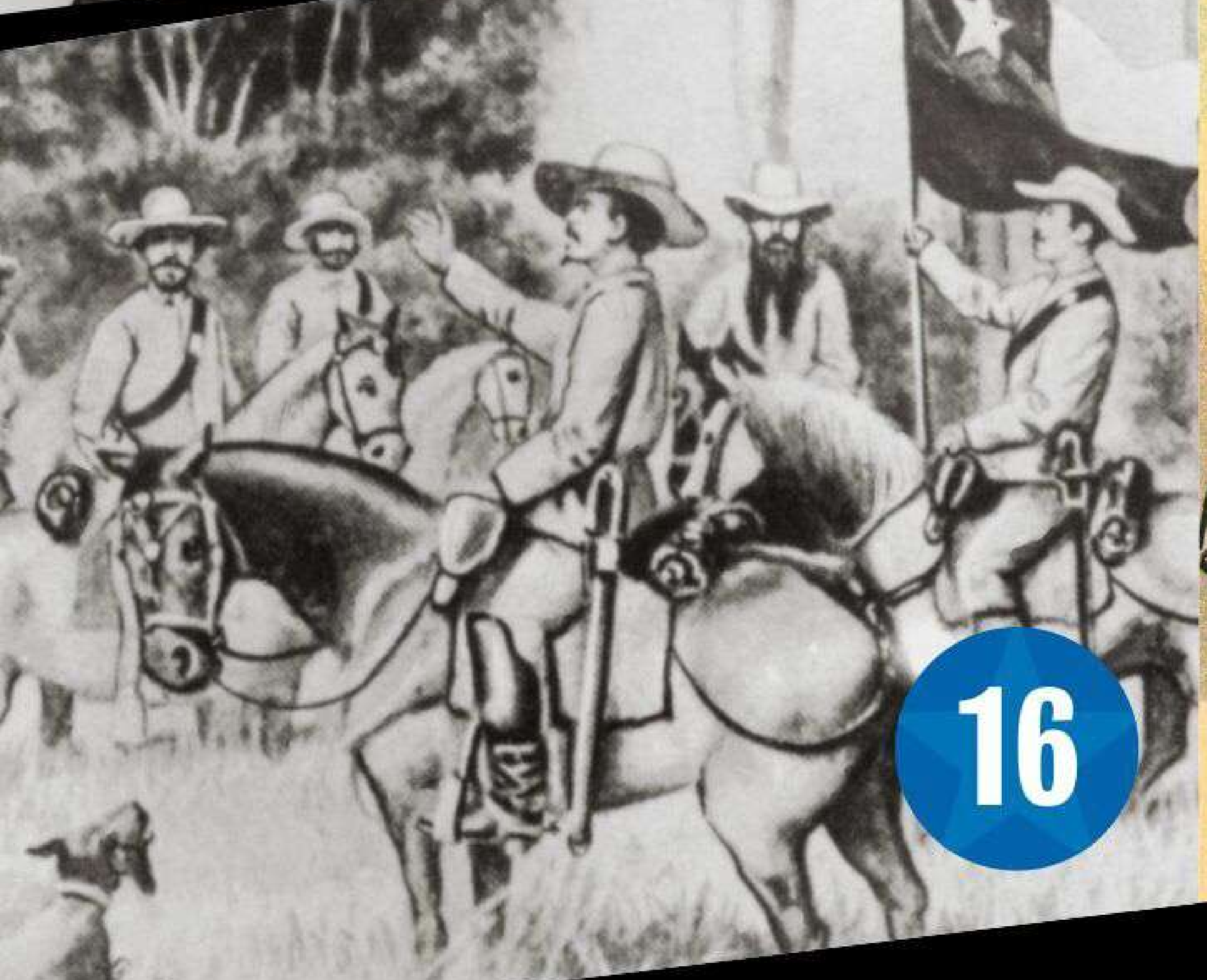

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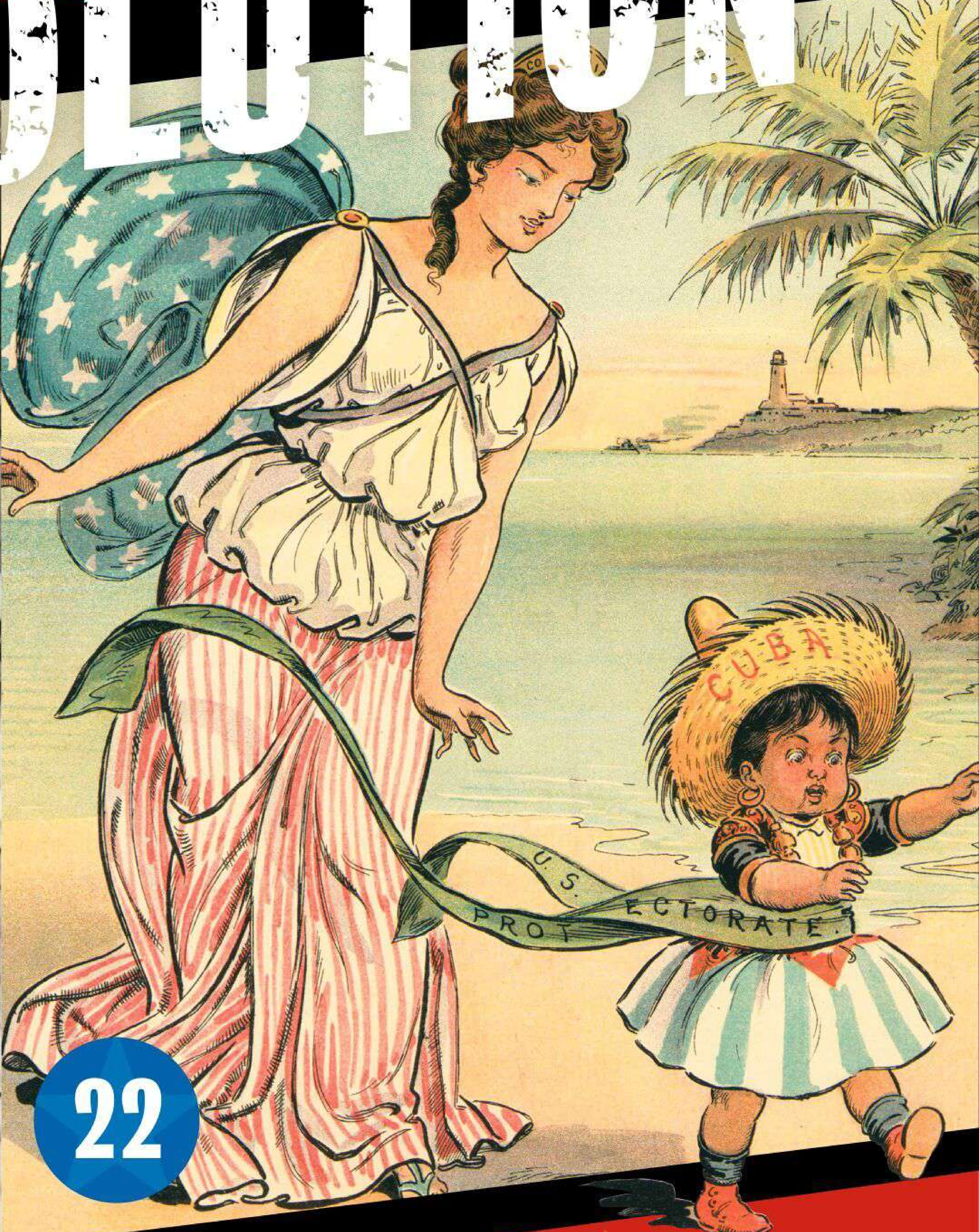
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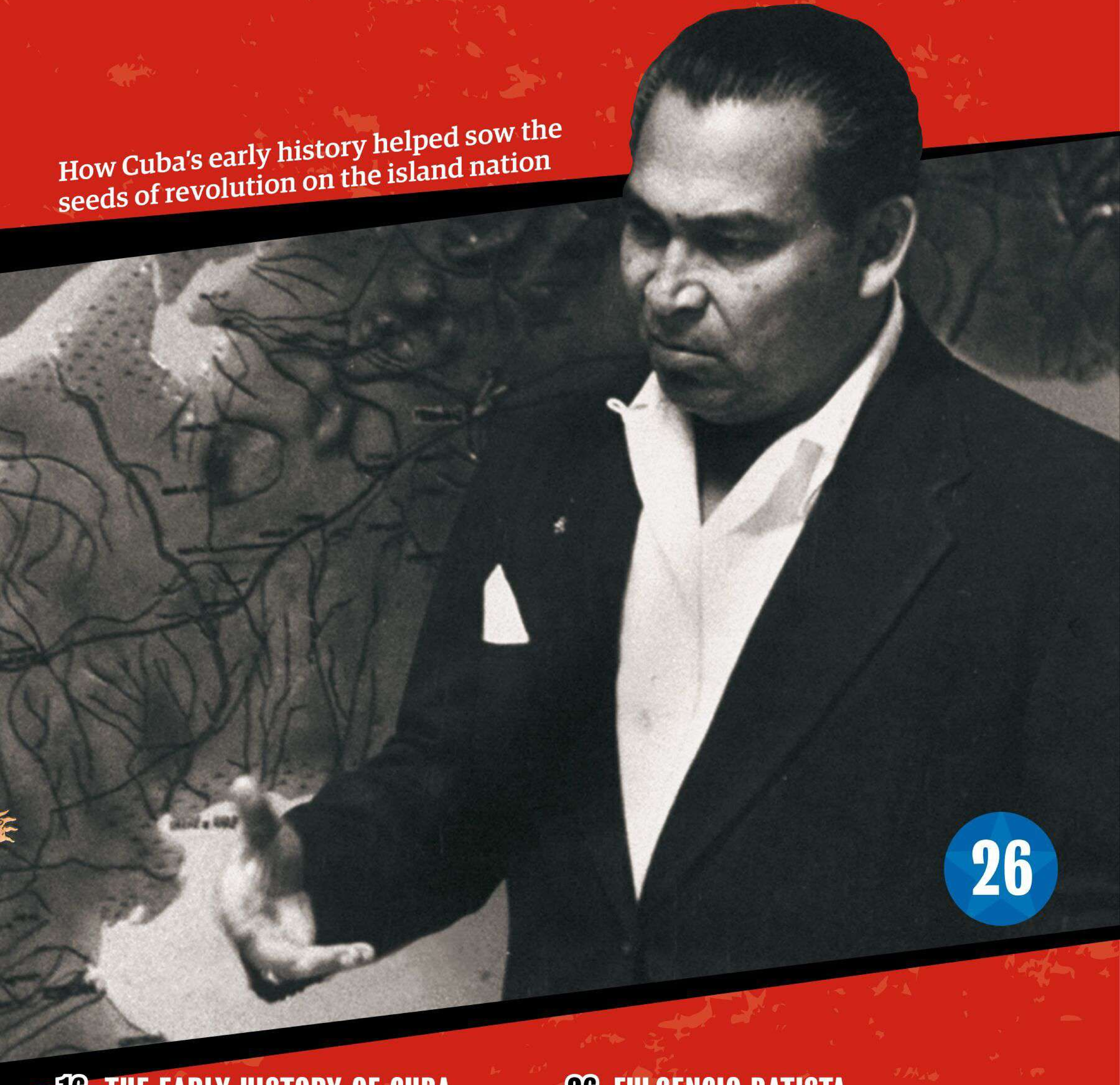
How Cuba's early history helped sow the seeds of revolution on the island nation



**16** THE EARLY HISTORY OF CUBA
Absorbed into a mighty empire, Cuba would rail under the yoke of imperialism for almost 400 years

**22** AN ERA OF UNREST
From the turn of the 20th century to Batista's coup in 1952, Cuba endured continuing political upheaval

**26** FULGENCIO BATISTA
A young Batista came to power on a wave of populist support. So what went wrong?

**30** MILITARY COUP AND ABSOLUTE POWER
After seizing power in 1952, Batista ruled Cuba with an iron fist

# THE EARLY HISTORY OF CUBA

Conquered by Spain and absorbed into a mighty empire, Cuba would rail under the yoke of imperialism for almost 400 years

Written by
**WILL LAWRENCE**

In what has become such a prevalent truth in modern history, the indigenous people of Cuba played no significant role in the development of their country. Like many native cultures of the Caribbean, and Central and South America, the precolonial people of Cuba, the Taínos, the Ciboney and the Guanajatabey, were killed off by foreign invaders – whether via disease, musket or steel – or else were assimilated into a new population through intermarriage.

Their gradual extinction as the sovereign peoples came courtesy of the mighty Spanish empire, which poked its long barbed tendrils into the island's history from the moment that Christopher Columbus first appeared off Cuba's northern coast in 1492. Two years later, on a second voyage from Europe, he sailed the Cuban coastline and explored the villages along the island's southern rim, writing favourable notes in his journal.

The Spanish went on to establish their first permanent Caribbean base on Hispaniola and left Cuba largely untouched until 1511 when Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar landed near Baracoa with 300 men and a heart set on conquest. He met fierce resistance from the native people who were led by the brave chieftain Hatuey, a refugee from Hispaniola who had experienced first-hand Spanish brutality during the Jaragua massacre in his homeland during 1503. Velázquez hunted down Hatuey and burned him at the stake. Still the islanders resisted and Velázquez called for help, which arrived in the form of Pánfilo de Narváez, who sailed from Jamaica and was placed at the head of a strike force that fanned out across the island and which sailed the coast.

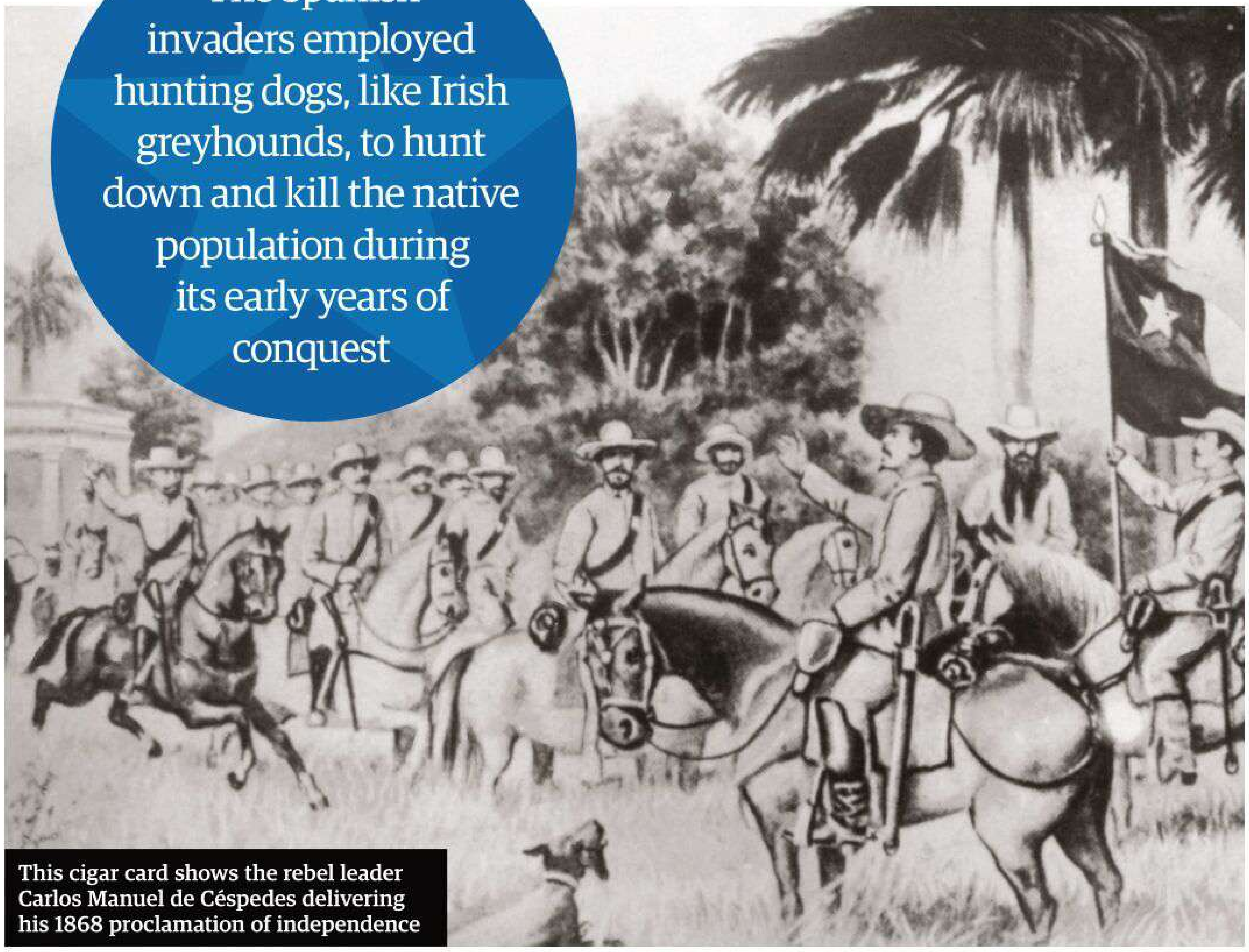
As ever, the conquistadors were searching for gold. On Cuba they found little, and when the mines and rivers had finally relinquished their feeble yield, the indigenous population was set to work in agriculture. Velázquez was appointed as the island's governor, a post he held until his death in 1524.

It was from Cuba that Hernán Cortés left for Mexico, and though by the middle of the 16th century Havana's deep water harbour came into play as a gateway to the New World, life on Cuba itself proved precarious. It is said that by 1544 there were no more than 7,000 people on the island, of which only 660 were Spanish, and they were under constant threat, either from potential uprisings among the burgeoning slave population, or from Spain's great enemies, England and France. And though the laws had by this date changed to recognise the native people as vassals rather than slaves, the indigenous population would never recover. As the Spanish settlers sought workers for the land, they looked to the slave routes from Africa.

The influx of African slaves to Cuba began with an edict issued in 1527 demanding the importation of '1,000 negro slaves… to lessen the labours of the Indians'

The chieftain Hatuey fought bravely before the Spanish captured him and burned him alive

The Spanish invaders employed hunting dogs, like Irish greyhounds, to hunt down and kill the native population during its early years of conquest


This cigar card shows the rebel leader Carlos Manuel de Céspedes delivering his 1868 proclamation of independence

During the 17th century, Cuba's economy began to shift and the foundations were laid for later prosperity with the harvesting and selling of tobacco and sugar, replacing livestock rearing as the island's primary source of revenue. Along with Puerto Rico and Hispaniola, Cuba was among the first Caribbean territory to plant sugar cane. Tobacco, meanwhile, was indigenous to the region. Indeed, so rich was Cuba's tobacco harvest that the Spanish soon recognised it as a source of revenue to fund the island's defence, and in 1717 a monopoly was established whereby farmers could only sell to the crown.

The monopoly limited the growers' prosperity, though farmers only became fully aware of their product's potential once the English attacked and occupied Havana in 1762 and eliminated Spanish trade restrictions. Less than a year later, England and France signed the Treaty of Paris, bringing the Seven Years' War to a close. In a deal with Spain, who had backed France in the conflict, the English returned Cuba in exchange for Florida, though they had opened the Cuban farmers' eyes to the potential to be gleaned from trade with others.

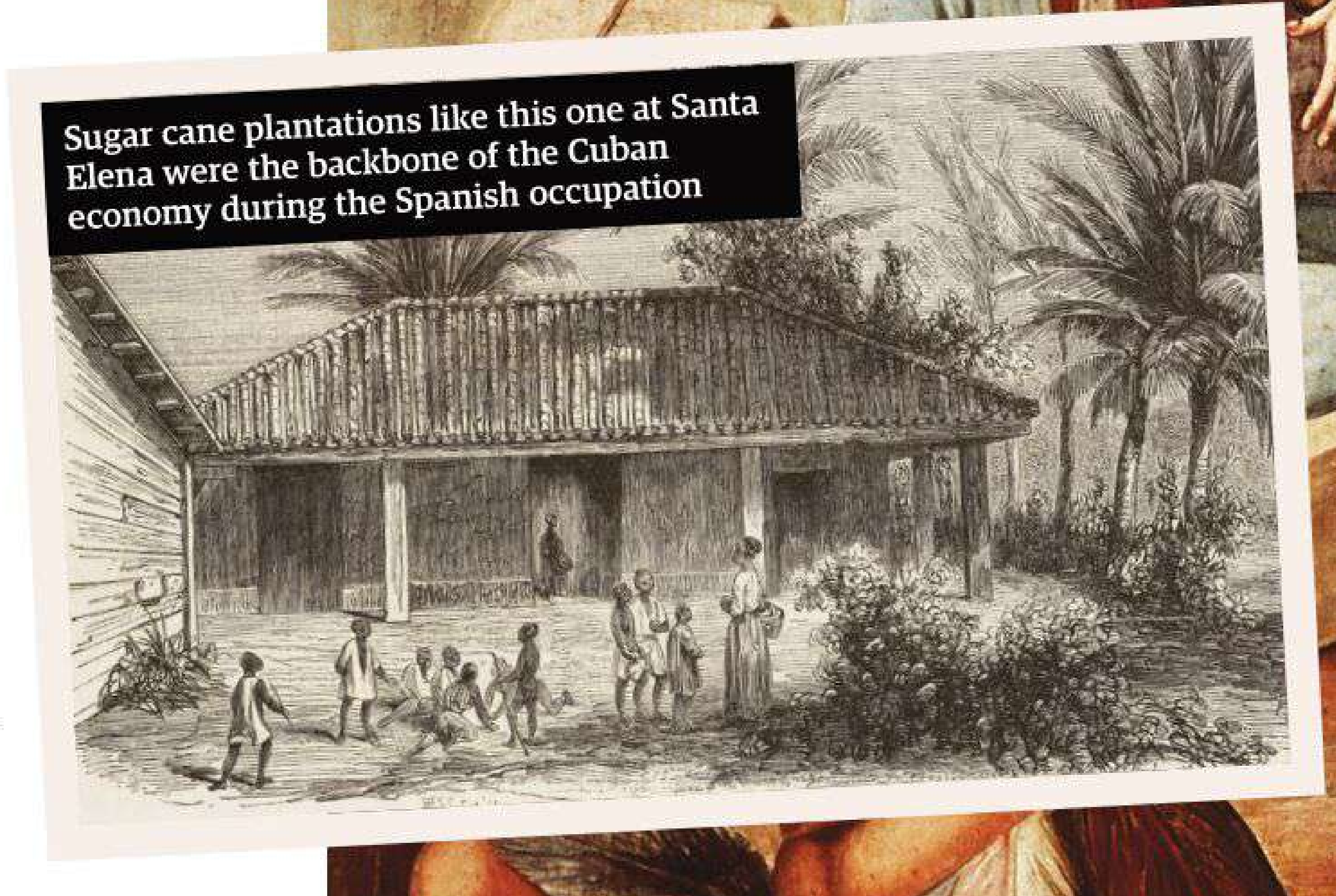
Sugar production increased immediately. Prior to the English invasion, sugar exports had averaged around 300 tons a year. In the six years following the 1763 Treaty of Paris, they averaged 2,000 tons a year. Then, when a successful slave revolt erupted in the nearby French colony of St Domingue – the largest sugar producer in the world at the time – not only did Cuba receive a flood of sugar-wise refugees, but it also reaped a commercial boon; its largest competitor had been hamstrung. By 1805 Cuba's sugar mills had doubled from prior to the English invasion and with a workforce boosted by a large influx of African slaves, annual output averaged 34,000 tons. During 1817 the crown finally terminated its monopoly on tobacco and by the following year Cuba's ports were open to the world.

It was during the early years of the 19th century that the winds of independence began to blow. The first organised uprising erupted in 1810, a mixture of black and white, workers and aristocrats, though it was swiftly crushed by Spanish loyalists. Two years later the island's black population rebelled and there were further slave uprisings in 1826, 1837, 1843 and 1844. Their concern saw the Cuban planters turn to the United States for help, lobbying planters and politicians in the South amid concerns that the English would eventually pressure Spain into ordering all the slaves (many of whom were acquired illegally following Spain's pledge to ban slavery by 1820) out of the colony. As many as 200,000 slaves may have arrived in Cuba, illegally, between 1840 and 1860.

The Southern states responded to the Cuban planters' call and some Americans dreamed of overthrowing the Spanish and annexing the island themselves. A number of small armed invasions were launched from American shores – the filibuster expeditions – though these all failed. The American Civil War then ended any hopes the planters or Southern states may have harboured, though if the Cubans were downhearted they were soon placated by an upsurge in trade. The Civil War destroyed many American sugar plantations and Cuba's exports rose even further, boosted by a steady flow of Asian migrant workers.

The winds of change continued to gather, however, and further zephyrs of unrest swept the island just as a period of political instability hit Spain, beginning with the deposal of Queen Isabella in 1868. The Cuban population objected to the draconian rule of captain-general Francisco Lersundi and rebellion stirred once more. In October 1868 Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, a radical landowner from the east of the island, where sugar production was at its weakest, delivered his proclamation of independence, freeing his slaves to fight in his rebel army. This launched the cruel and bloody conflict known as the Ten Years' War, which closed with an armistice in 1878, the Pact of Zanjón.

The peace precipitated the abolition of slavery in 1886, while it also led to a realisation among the Cuban landowners that for all that was promised in the Pact of Zanjón, Spain still had no intention of relinquishing any real power to the local people. And when the world economy began to slide in the 1890s and demand for Cuban sugar fell, the stage was set for yet another major revolt. The leading lights in this second war for independence included two veterans of the Ten Years' War, Máximo Gómez, who had commanded the rebel military in that conflict, and Antonio Maceo, who had been his chief commander


Sugar cane plantations like this one at Santa Elena were the backbone of the Cuban economy during the Spanish occupation

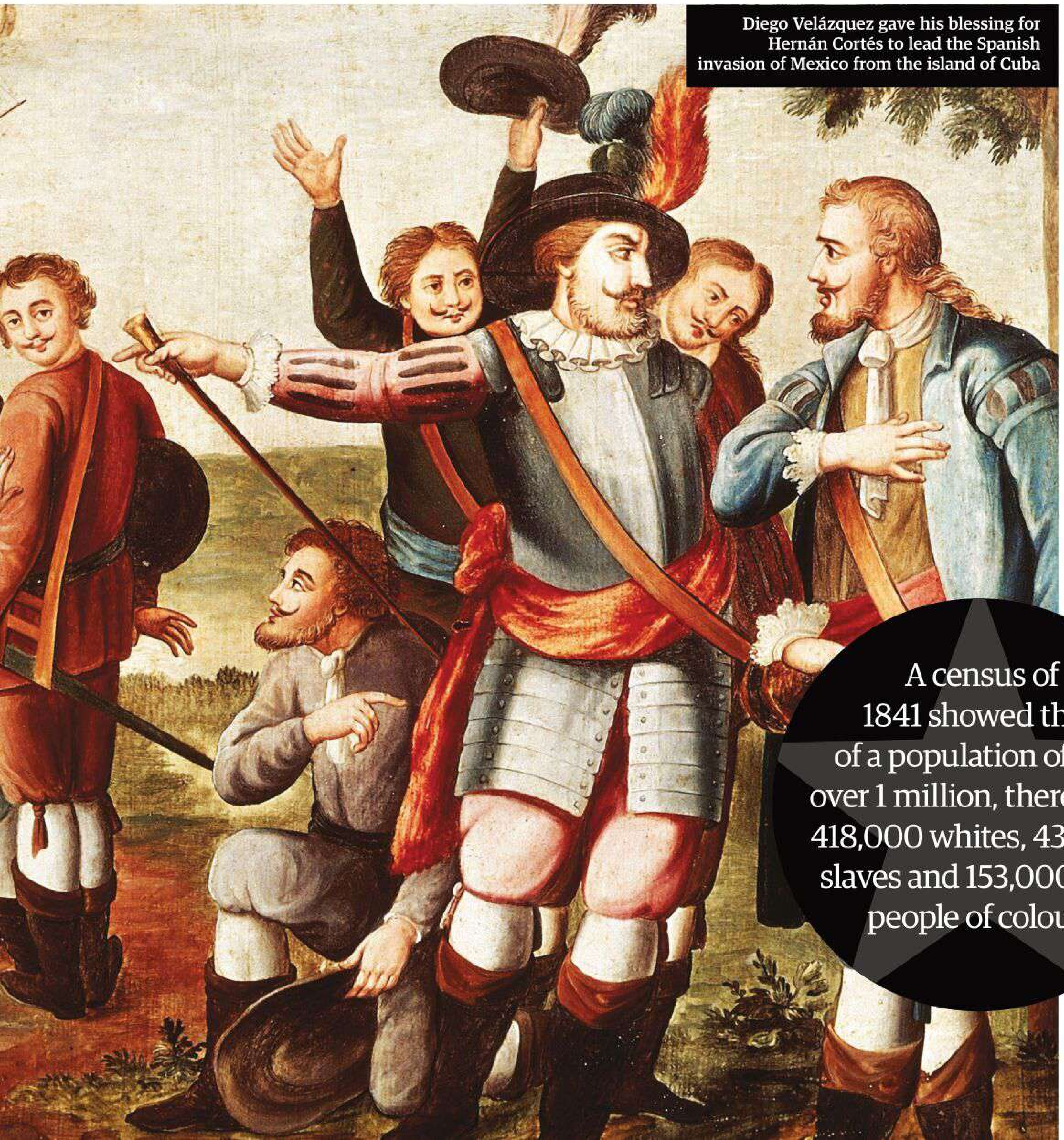
# REMEMBER THE MAINE

## The sinking of the USS Maine in Havana harbour was the catalyst for Spanish-American war

With a peaceful conclusion to the Second Cuban War of Independence from Spain hanging in the balance, President McKinley dispatched the battleship USS Maine to protect American lives and property. Yet on 15 February 1898, the Maine exploded in Havana harbour killing 260 American sailors. "The Maine was sunk by an act of dirty treachery," wrote Theodore Roosevelt, then US assistant secretary of the Navy, in his diary. The American press, supported by an official enquiry, agreed. The American people were outraged. Many demanded revenge. The press railed against Spain's dirty tricks. The US declared war.

The Spanish authorities had denied any involvement, claiming that it was an internal explosion that sunk the ship. They were almost certainly correct. During the 1970s, US Admiral Hyman Rickover conducted a thorough investigation into the incident, concluding that an internal coal fire in a bunker adjacent to the magazine had indeed caused the explosion. "The Maine was the excuse," writes one leading historian, "but had it not occurred some other event would almost certainly have sparked a war." America was gripped amid expansionist fervour - the frontier had been conquered and the Indian Wars concluded with the massacre at Wounded Knee. The US had the remains of the 400-year-old Spanish empire set firmly in its sights…

The US press seized on the sinking of the USS Maine to demand a war with Spain


Diego Velázquez gave his blessing for Hernán Cortés to lead the Spanish invasion of Mexico from the island of Cuba

in the field. These men returned to the island in 1895, Gomez arriving with José Martí, a radical freethinker who would go down in Latin American history as one of the great revolutionaries.

While Martí was a political organiser, Gómez and Maceo were experienced guerrilla fighters, and across the island men flocked to their cause, leaving their homelands to join the rebels in the mountains. The Spanish responded by appointing Arsenio Martínez Campos as captain-general, the author of the 1878 Pact of Zanjón. He arrived in April 1895 with 7,000 men, boosting the island's Spanish military to 32,000 troops. Yet still the rebellion prospered with blacks and whites taking up the cause, and when in January 1896 Gómez and his troops appeared before the gates of Havana, with Maceo advancing on Pinar del Río, the Spanish faced defeat. Campos refused to suppress the non-combatants, which many in Spain considered a vital strategy in winning the war, and he was soon on his way back to Madrid with his head bowed.

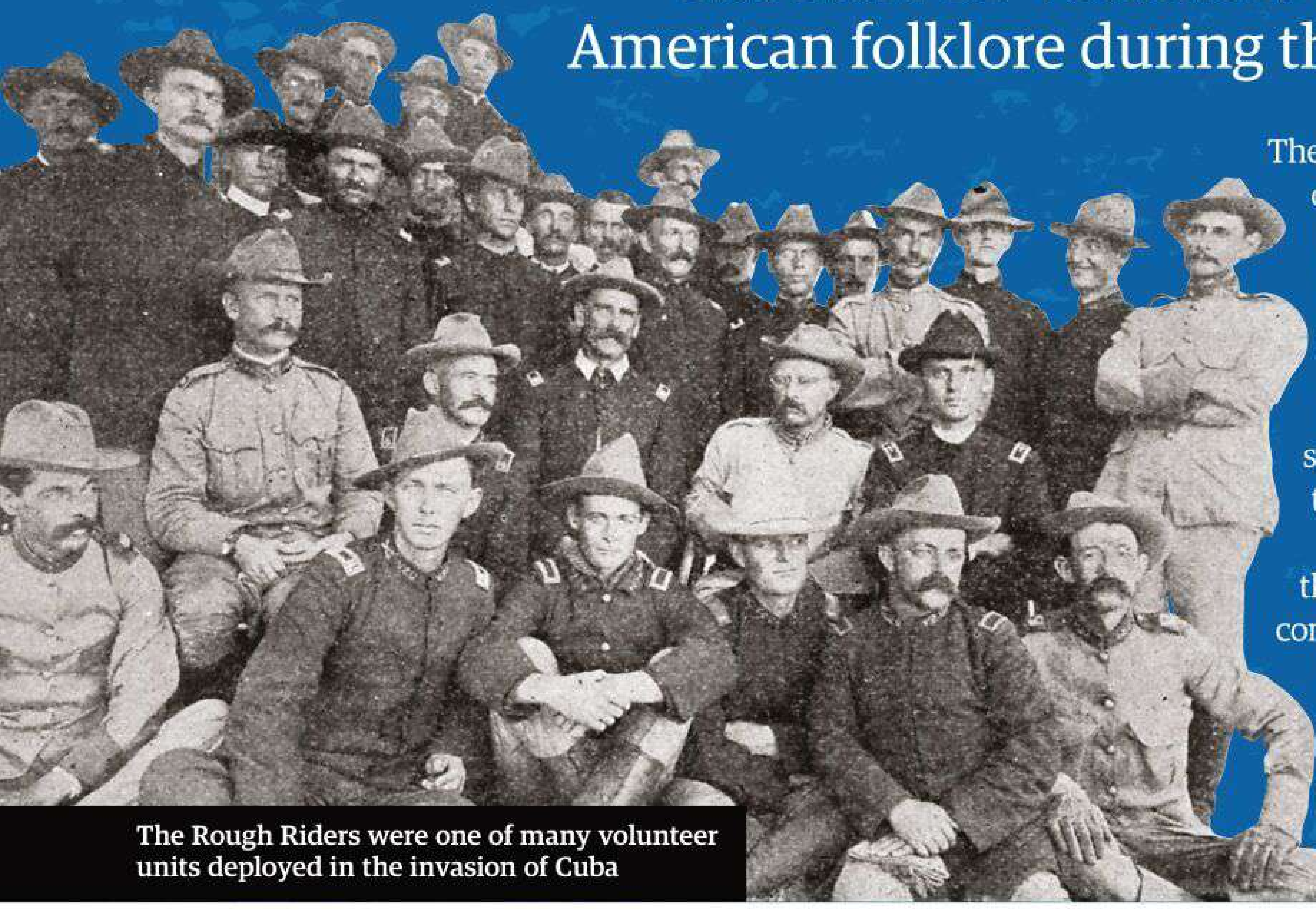
Campos's replacement, Valeriano Weyler, was another veteran of the Ten Years' War and he proved to be what one historian describes as "a genuine scorched-earth expert", a staunch proponent of a devastating tactic he had witnessed first-hand when following General Sherman as Spain's military attaché during the American Civil War.

Putting a force of 60,000 into the field, Weyler wreaked havoc on the Cuban countryside and unlike his predecessor he had no qualms about bullying the

A census of 1841 showed that of a population of just over 1 million, there were 418,000 whites, 436,000 slaves and 153,000 'free people of colour'

## THEODORE ROOSEVELT & THE ROUGH RIDERS

The First US Volunteer Cavalry galloped into American folklore during the Spanish-American war


The Rough Riders were one of many volunteer units deployed in the invasion of Cuba

The one major land battle in the Spanish-American War unfolded on 1 July 1898 on the hill of San Juan outside Santiago. It was fought over the course of a long, dogged day as under 1,000 Spaniards defended an attack by more than 3,000 Americans. The casualties were far from insignificant; 223 Americans died and more than 1,000 were wounded. The scrap is best remembered, however, for the role played by the First US Volunteer Cavalry commanded by General Leonard Wood, who would go on to become the ruler of Cuba. His second in command was one Theodore Roosevelt, the US assistant secretary of the Navy, who took the rank of lieutenant-colonel.

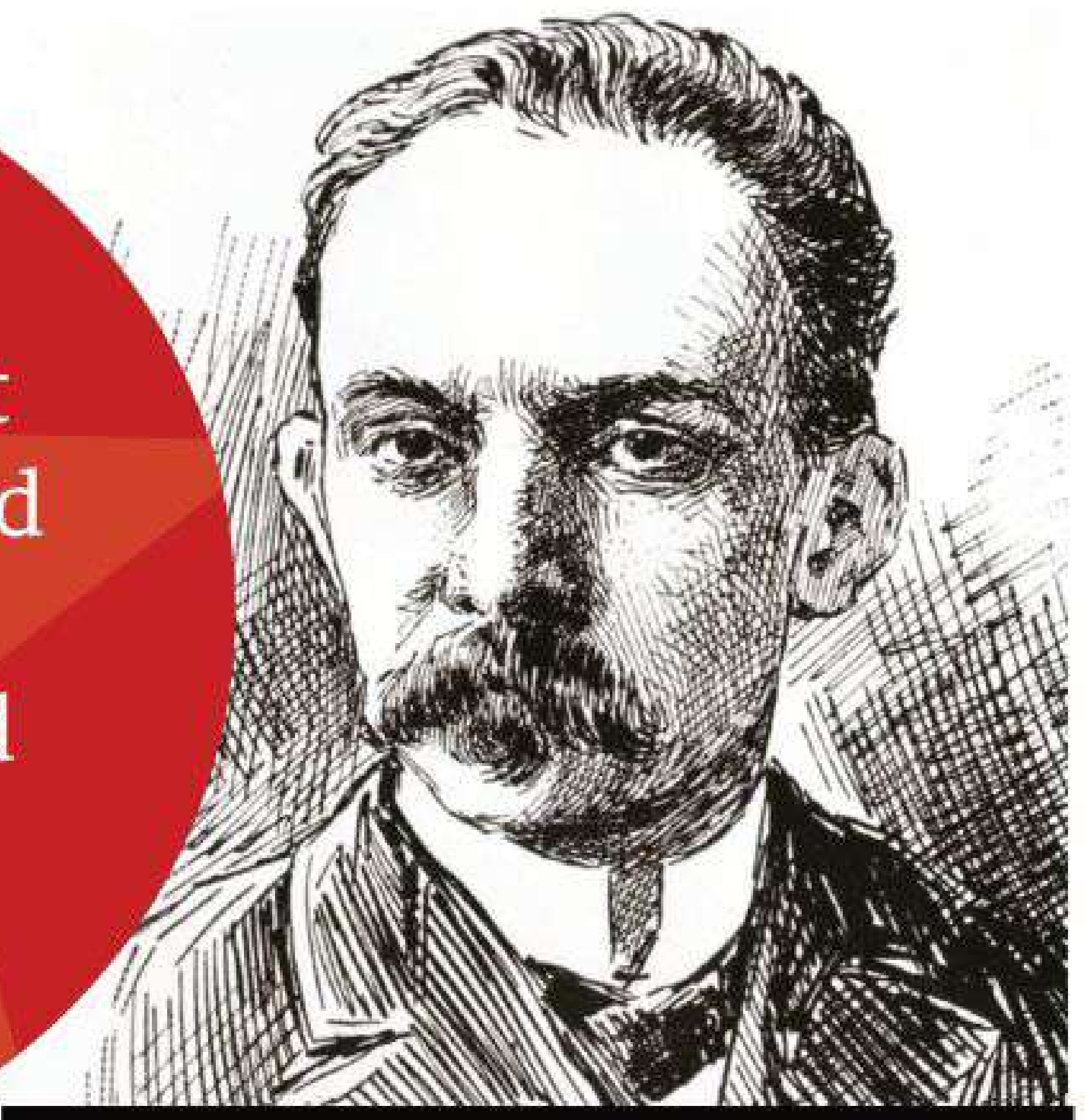
The troop was a colourful regiment of volunteers that earned the nickname the Rough Riders, with the future President Roosevelt writing that they comprised "the wild riders and riflemen of the Rockies and the Great Plains." Certainly, they were a disparate company, ranging from West Point graduates and college professors to paupers and horse-thieves. One contingent comprised Native Americans - Cherokee and Chickasaw, Choctaw and Creek. Their bravery and colourful backgrounds ensured the Rough Riders enjoy a hallowed place in the early military history of the United States.

populace. He forced large numbers of non-combatants into concentration camps, thereby depriving the rebels of food and support. Likewise, Maceo and Gómez ravaged the local infrastructure with harsh penalties for any plantation that refused to support their cause.

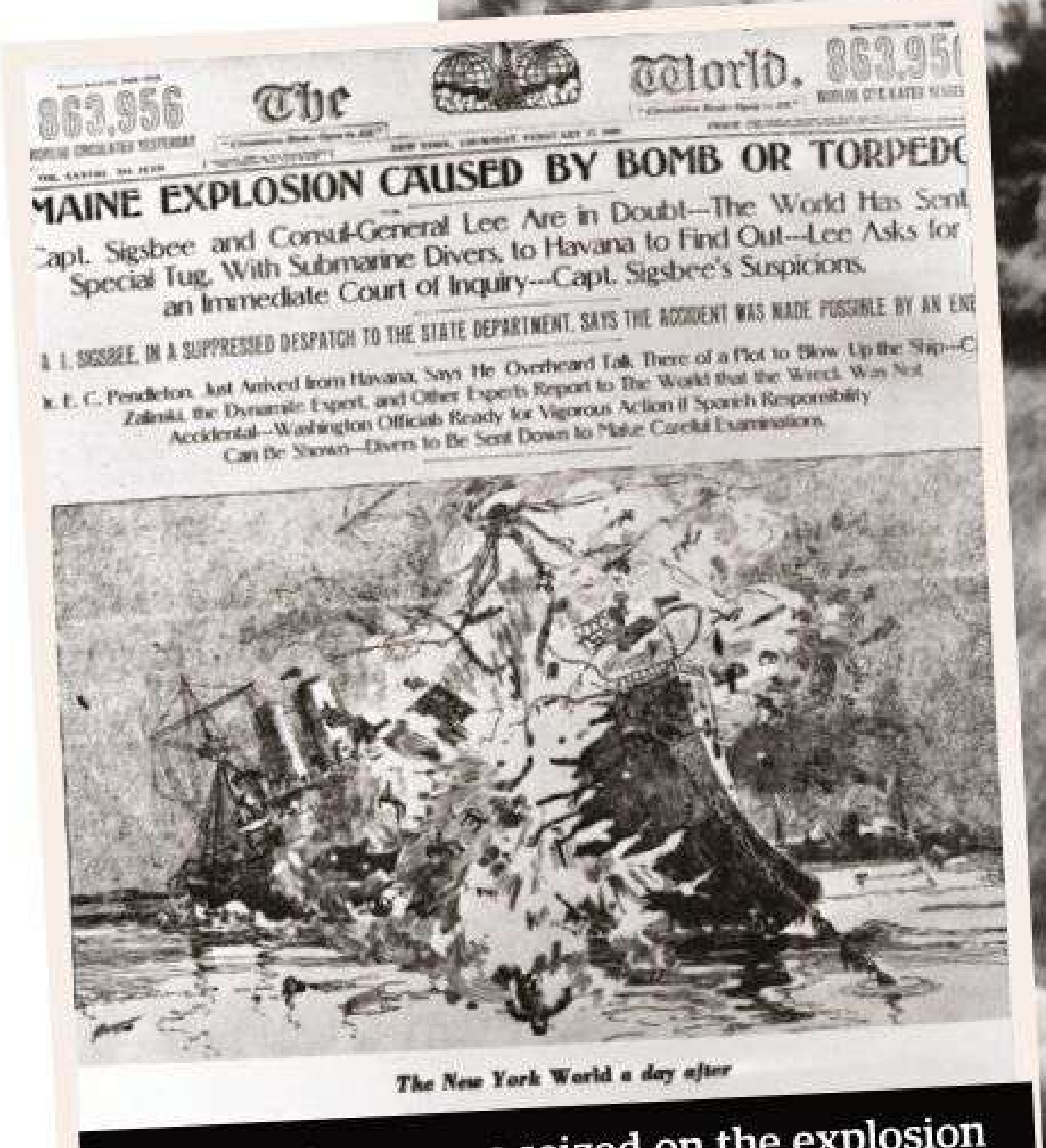
By the middle of 1896, the Cuban economy had ground to a halt and diseases ravaged the populace in their internment camps. Within a year, Spain had gained the upper hand. Maceo was killed at the end of 1896 and Gómez was pressed into defensive action. The rebels received an unexpected fillip, however, with the assassination of the hard-line Spanish prime minister bringing in a more liberal man, who deplored the cost of his nation's colonial wars in terms of money and manpower (the Philippines was also in a state of rebellion). Práxedes Sagasta sought to bring about a peaceful settlement, promising Cuba a fuller state of autonomy. Weyler resigned. And yet still the rebels resisted; they had seen Spain's empty promises before in the Pact of Zanjón and would not concede.

With the conflict dragging on, American investors in Cuba

American interest in Cuba heightened in 1821 when it officially acquired Spanish Florida


A powerful intellectual, José Martí remains widely celebrated in Latin America for his dream of Cuban independence

The cruelty of Spanish commander Valeriano Weyler did much to foster anti-Spanish sentiment in mainland America


863,956 The World. 863,95

MAINE EXPLOSION CAUSED BY BOMB OR TORPED

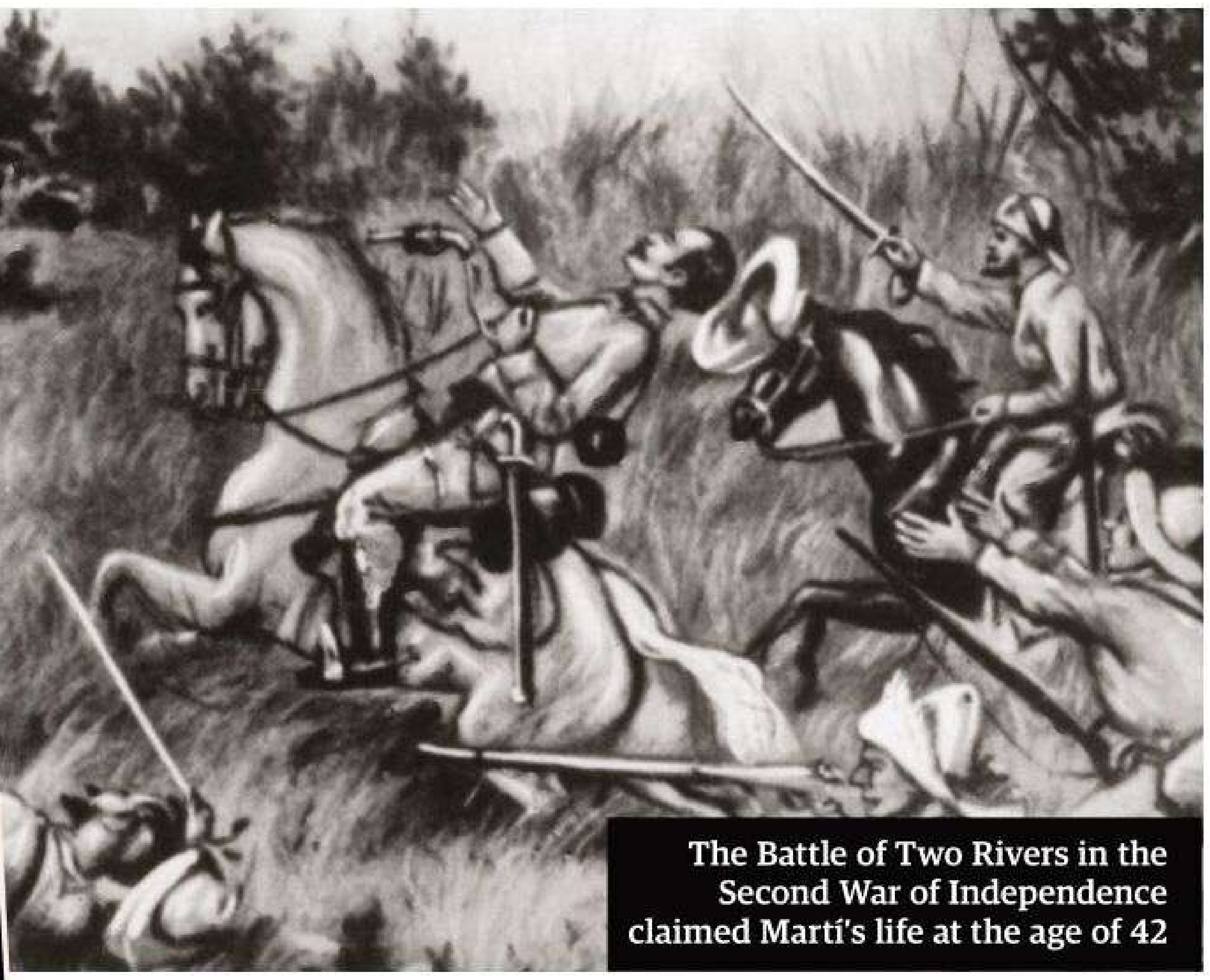
Capt. Sigsbee and Consul-General Lee Are in Doubt--The World Has Sent
Special Tug, With Submarine Divers, to Havana to Find Out--Lee Asks for
an Immediate Court of Inquiry--Capt. Sigsbee's Suspicions.

L. SIGSBEE, IN A SUPPRESSED DESPATCH TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT, SAYS THE ACCIDENT WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY AN EN

E. C. Pendleton, Just Arrived from Havana, Says He Overheard Talk There of a Plot to Blow Up the Ship--C
Zalinski, the Dynamite Expert, and Other Experts Report to The World that the Wreck Was Not
Accidental--Washington Officials Ready for Vigorous Action if Spanish Responsibility
Can Be Shown--Divers to Be Sent Down to Make Careful Examinations.

The New York World a day after

The American press seized on the explosion aboard the USS Maine to pressure Congress into the war with Spain


The Battle of Two Rivers in the Second War of Independence claimed Martí's life at the age of 42

agitated for military intervention from their own government, a move that had gained widespread support when the full extent of Weyler's cruel tactics was reported in the US press. President McKinley dispatched the battleship USS Maine to Havana to protect American interests, and her fate (see boxout) fanned the flames of indignation back in the US. The pro-war tide was rising and on 25 April 1898, the US Congress declared war on Spain. In a remarkable move, Spain appealed to Gómez and the Cuban rebels, urging Hispanic unity against the territorial claims of the Americans, but Gómez declined, thereby welcoming US intervention. Most Cubans, and indeed many Americans, believed that US intervention was a selfless act, aimed at dislodging an imperial power that suppressed its people. The truth, however, was something rather different.

> The American press magnate William Randolph Hearst who advocated the invasion of Cuba sailed with the US force and was a prominent figure at the Battle of San Juan Hill

The fighting did not last long. The Spanish Atlantic fleet was blockaded in the harbour at Santiago and though they resisted bravely – most notably at the pivotal battle at San Juan Hill in Santiago – the Spanish land forces were soon overwhelmed. The Treaty of Paris was signed on 10 December 1898, bringing to an end a conflict that played host to Theodore Roosevelt and his Rough Riders who galloped into the history books (see boxout). And with the sinking of the Santiago fleet, prompted by a suicidal order to run the American blockade, the war with America was also the conflict that toppled the Spanish empire. The Americans had already sunk Spain's Pacific fleet in the Philippines and with the destruction of the Atlantic fleet, and the loss of Cuba, the Sun finally set on one of the world's mightiest imperial endeavours.

With American help, Cuba had finally won its independence, though many would wonder at what cost. The previous 30 years had destroyed countless families, and the island's economic infrastructure was crippled. Surveying the island General Lee said, "The great fertile island of Cuba in some places resembled an ash pile; in others the dreary desert." With up to two-thirds of its wealth engulfed by the most recent war, Cuba was placed under American military occupation led by General John Brooke, and then General Leonard Wood, the pair overseeing a rule that lasted for four years, finally coming to an end in 1902.

This was essentially a military dictatorship – this was America's first-ever bid at running another country – though it was largely a benign force. The government retained the Spanish administrative structures and many of the existing staff. Its intention was to ensure that Cuba remained within America's sphere of influence during the long-term, while it also sought to bring political stability, to rebuild the battered infrastructure and to attract American investment into a beleaguered economy. The Americans established an electoral system and three parties – the Nationalists, the Republicans and the Unión Democrática – contested the first municipal elections in June 1900. It was not all benevolence, though, and the new rulers were more than disdainful of the Cubans themselves, demonstrating particularly pronounced bigotry towards the large black population.

Elections for a constituent assembly followed in December 1900 and much to General Wood's chagrin the pro-Independence parties, the Nationalists and Republicans, won the most seats. Independence was now inevitable though America made the most of the situation. Prior to 1898 almost every tobacco company on the island was controlled by Cubans or Spaniards. By the time the US government departed in 1902, American companies controlled more than 90 per cent of the export trade in Cuban cigars and more than 50 per cent of tobacco production. Wood also granted more than 200 mining concessions to his fellow Americans, who were exempted from property taxes. By 1905 almost 13,000 Americans had purchased tracts of Cuban land.

In December 1901 Cuba finally elected its first president Tomás Estrada Palma and on 20 May 1902 the Cuban flag was flying for the first time. Even in independence, the new republic could not effectively sever governmental ties to America. During the drafting of the Cuban constitution, Wood and Elihu Root, the US secretary of war, had secured the passing of the Platt Amendment, which ensured that America would retain a powerful colonial influence over the island, securing the legal right to intervene in domestic Cuban politics should it deem that the local government lacked the ability to manage an effective rule.

The superpower would dispatch military units to Cuba on a number of occasions before the amendment was repealed in 1934. Cuba might have won its independence from Spain, but the stage was now set for America to shape the country's political, economic and cultural identity. As one historian writes, "José Martí's dream of a truly independent Cuba remained just that – a dream... The Cuban wars of independence were lost to the United States."

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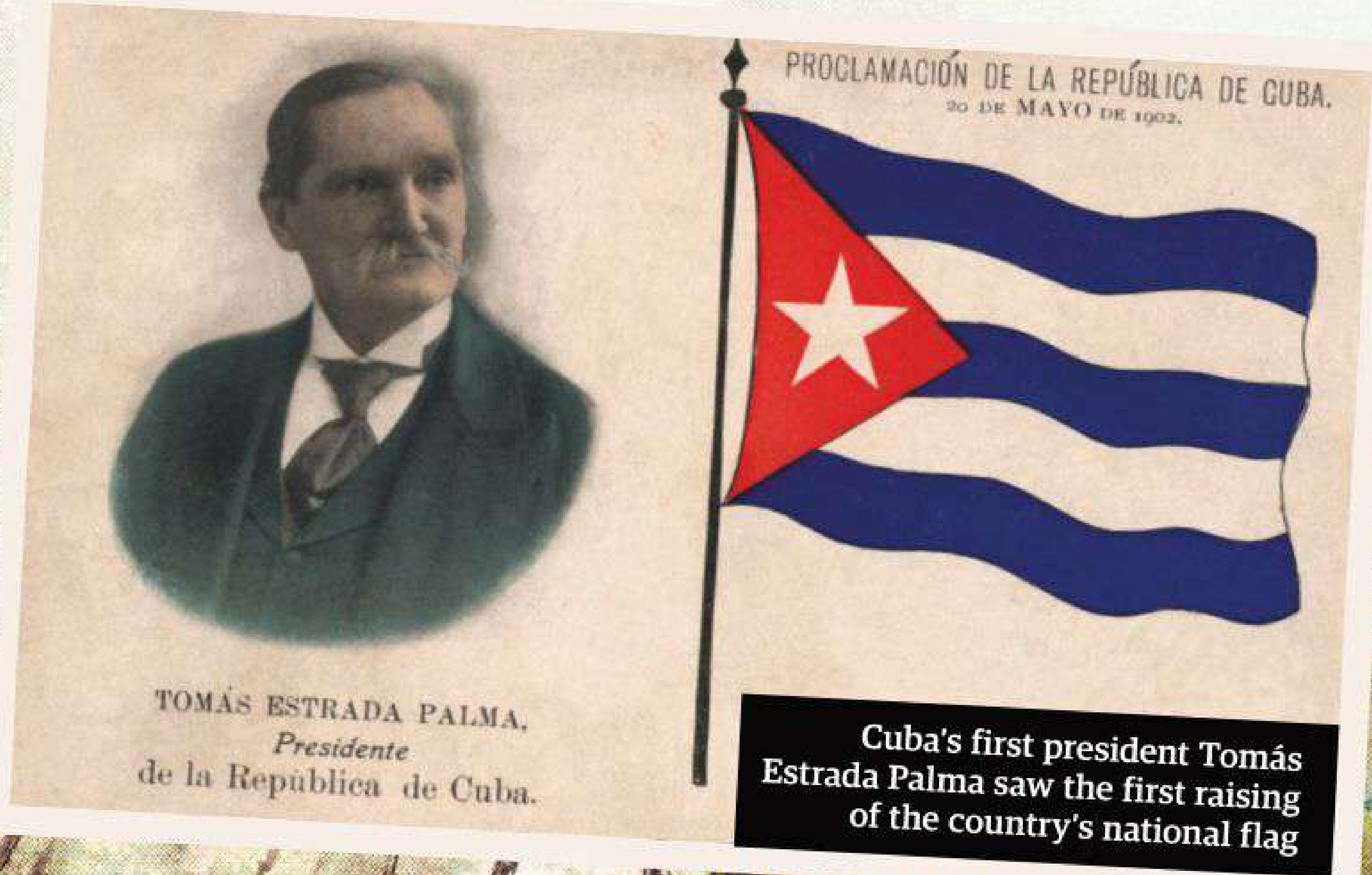
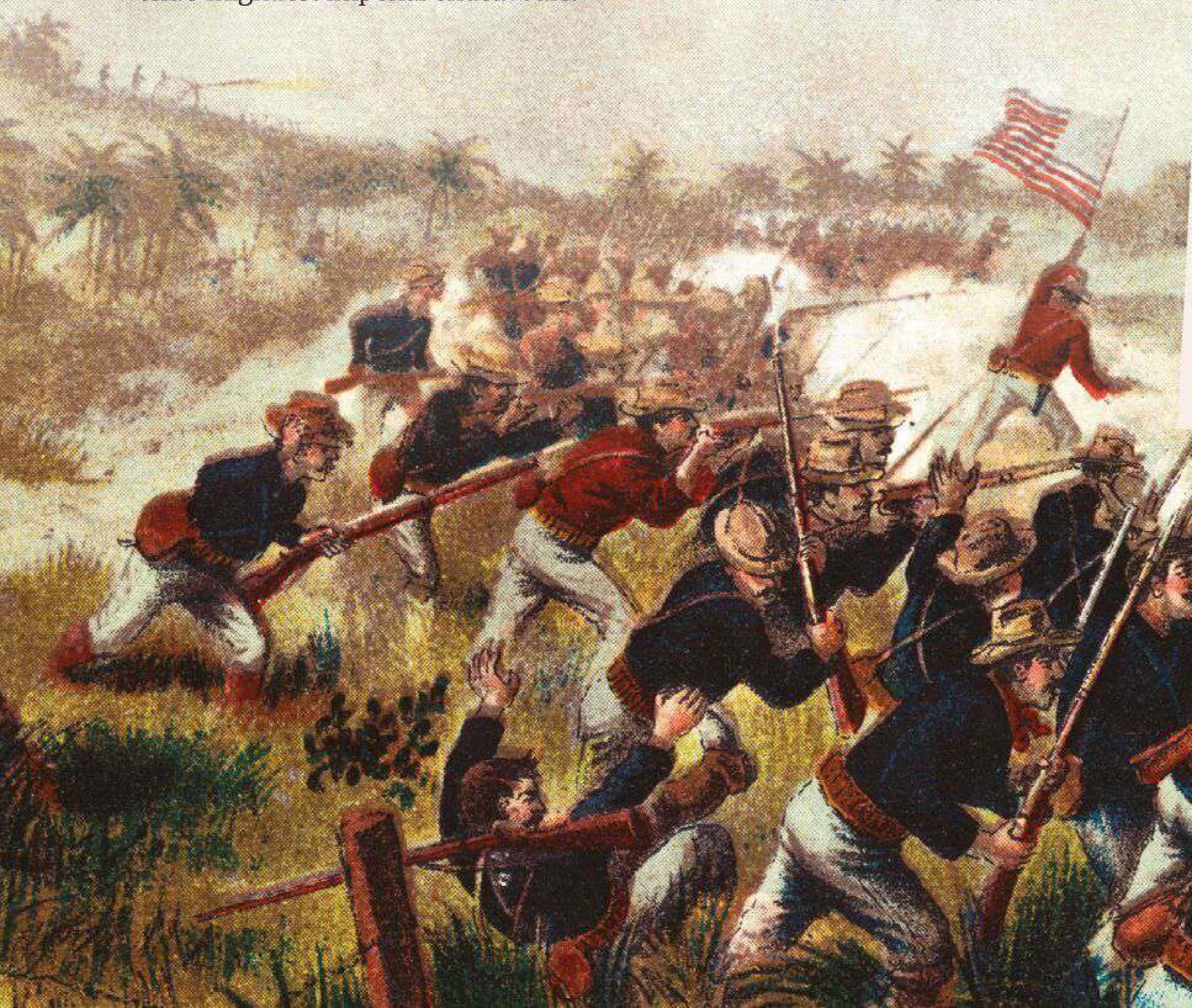
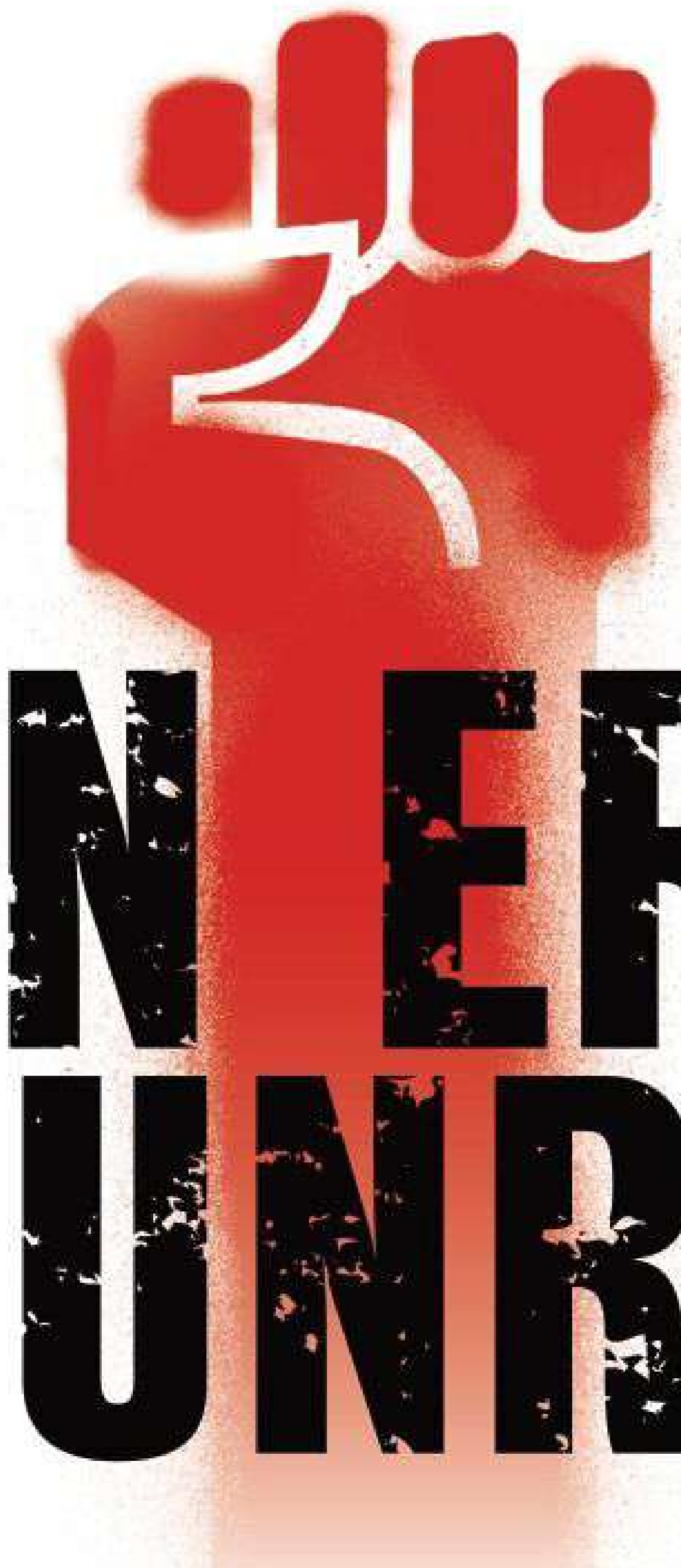

PROCLAMACIÓN DE LA REPÚBLICA DE CUBA.
20 DE MAYO DE 1902.
TOMÁS ESTRADA PALMA,
Presidente
de la República de Cuba.

Cuba's first president Tomás Estrada Palma saw the first raising of the country's national flag



The Americans outnumbered the Spanish around 3:1 at the pivotal Battle of San Juan Hill



# AN ERA OF UNREST

From the half century when Cuba gained independence to the coup d'état engineered by Fulgencio Batista, the country endured continuing political upheaval

Written by
**MIKE HASKEW**

Following the revolution against imperial Spain and the defeat of the European power that had dominated life in Cuba for centuries, in the Spanish-American War, the Cuban nation emerged as independent.

On 20 May 1902, the Republic of Cuba was born, but the new nation lacked a charismatic leader who could galvanise the support of the people and form an effective government. Moreover, since the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898, troops of the United States Army had occupied the country to maintain civil order and protect American interests on the island. Cuba, located 145 kilometres (90 miles) off the coast of Florida, was destined it seemed to exist in the shadow of its powerful neighbour to the north.

In fulfilment of its role as the dominant power in the western hemisphere, the United States exerted tremendous influence over the political and economic life of Cuba. The US Congress approved the Platt Amendment, which authorised the United States to intervene in the affairs of Cuba as necessary. The Platt Amendment applied strict limitations on the power of the Cuban government to act in a sovereign manner and preserved the US right to manipulate the country's internal affairs and limit its involvement with other nations.

The amendment read in part, "The Government of Cuba shall never enter into any treaty or other compact with any foreign power or powers which will impair or tend to impair the independence of Cuba, nor in any manner authorise or permit any foreign power or powers to obtain by colonisation or for military or naval purposes, or otherwise, lodgement in or control over any portion of said island." It further stated, "The Government of Cuba consents that the United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty, and for discharging the obligations with respect to Cuba imposed by the Treaty of Paris on the United States, now to be assumed and undertaken by the government of Cuba."

The Cuban-American Treaty of Relations was signed on 22 May 1903, and among its tenets was the right of the United States to lease Cuban territory for military installations and naval coaling stations. The American military facility at Guantanamo Bay, on the southern shore of the island, was established during this time and remains active today.

The Platt Amendment and the Treaty of Relations of 1903 survived more than three decades until they were replaced by the Treaty of Relations of 1934, which, among other provisions, guaranteed a 22 per cent share of the massive US sugar market to Cuba, a quota that was increased to 49 per cent a quarter of a century later. The 1934 revision reaffirmed some measures already in effect, but removed a few that were considered to be disrespectful of Cuban sovereignty and contrary to the Good Neighbor Policy of US President Franklin D Roosevelt.

During the first half of the 20th century, Cuba's government and its people in turn suffered in perpetual instability. The United States intervened in the country's affairs diplomatically and militarily on numerous occasions. Conservative Party frontman Tomás Estrada Palma was elected the first president of the Republic of Cuba in December 1901, and re-elected in late 1905; however, the electoral process was disputed by the Liberal Party, which refused to recognise its result. Palma was confronted with an armed insurrection, primarily led by veterans of the revolution against Spain. When the government forces neared defeat, the United States stepped in, appointing Charles Edward Magoon as governor for the next three years.

According to modern Cuban historians, the Magoon administration ushered in an era of corruption that dogged the island nation for years to come.

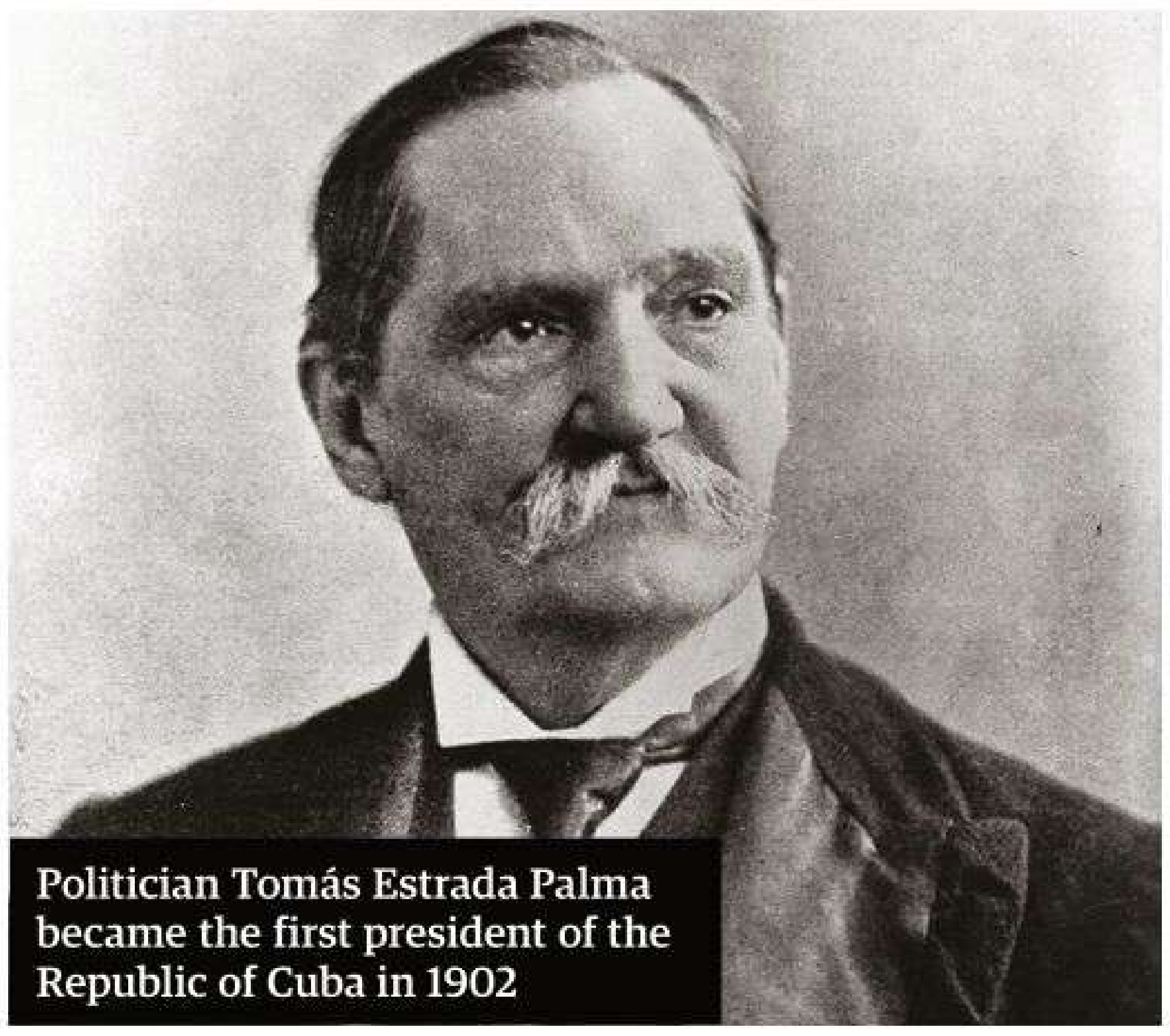
In 1912, President José Miguel Gómez wrestled with another revolt. Dissidents in the eastern province of Oriente took up arms against the government and were intent on establishing a new republic for black citizens. The army suppressed the revolt in a brief but bloody military campaign.

Cuba's dependence on sugar exports fostered an erratic, feast or famine economy, and a shortage

> Some 6,000 American soldiers occupied strategic locations in Cuba from 1906 to 1909 to maintain law and order

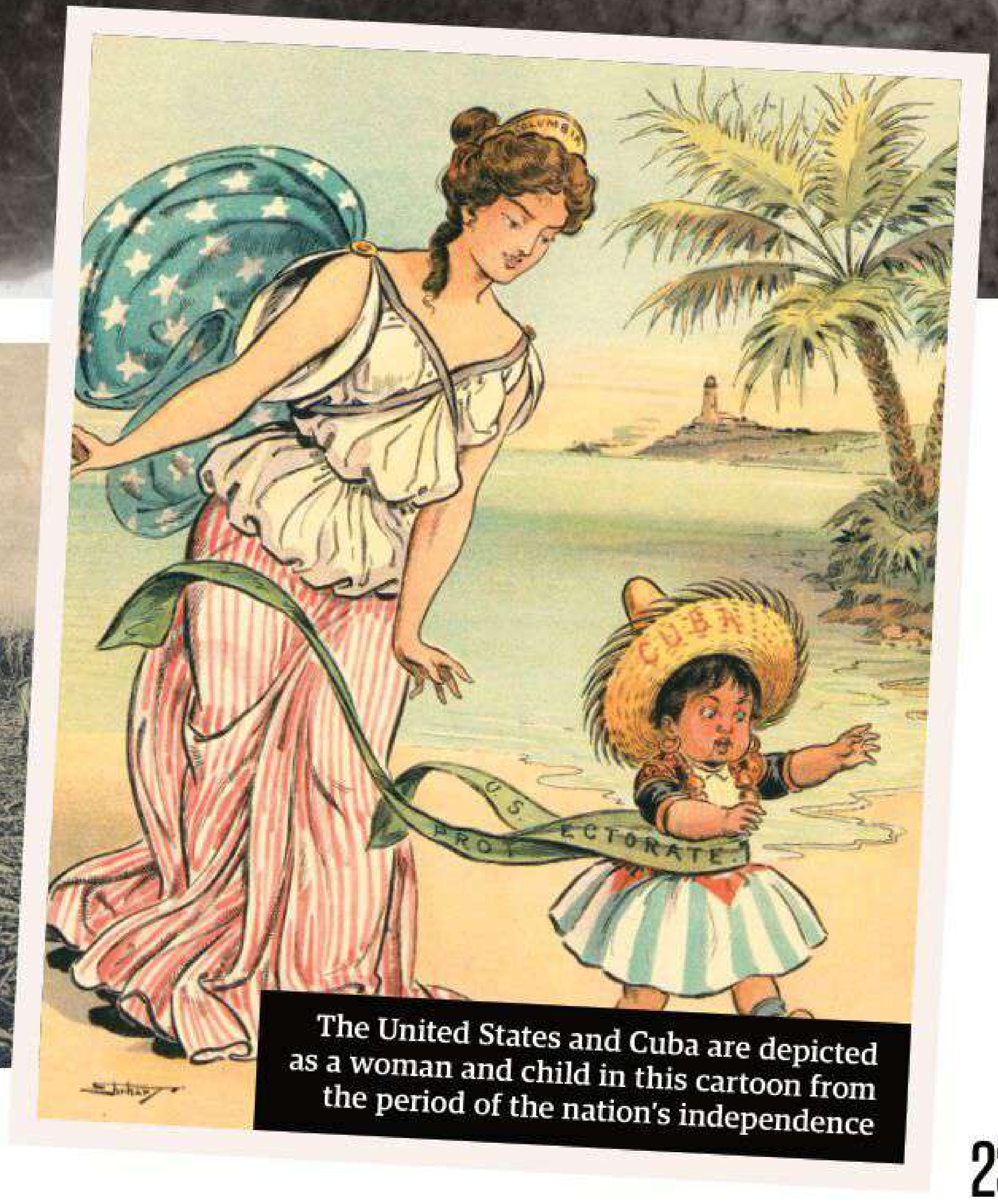
The Cuban flag flies for the first time in Havana while the US flag is also aloft on 20 May 1902

On several occasions, US Navy warships sailed into Havana harbour as a show of force during periods of Cuban unrest



Politician Tomás Estrada Palma became the first president of the Republic of Cuba in 1902

Workers labour in a Cuban sugar cane field. The sugar industry was the backbone of the Cuban economy



The United States and Cuba are depicted as a woman and child in this cartoon from the period of the nation's independence of the commodity brought about largely by World War I generated an economic boom and led to the conversion of large tracts of farmland from other products to sugar cane. However, by 1920, during a period known as the 'Dance of the Millions', the sugar market had cratered, wreaking financial havoc across Cuba and displacing thousands of workers who had been dependent on the industry for their livelihoods.

The election of Gerardo Machado to the presidency in the autumn of 1924 marked a turning point in the modern history of Cuba as American tourism became a lucrative pillar of the country's economy along with sugar production. American investment flooded into Cuba, and its beaches, hotels and casinos became a playground for US tourists who flocked to the island in large numbers. Although the influx of American dollars created jobs, gambling, prostitution and further corruption gained footholds, along with the introduction of the American Mafia. In time, organised crime would flourish amid the glittering nightlife in Havana, the capital city.

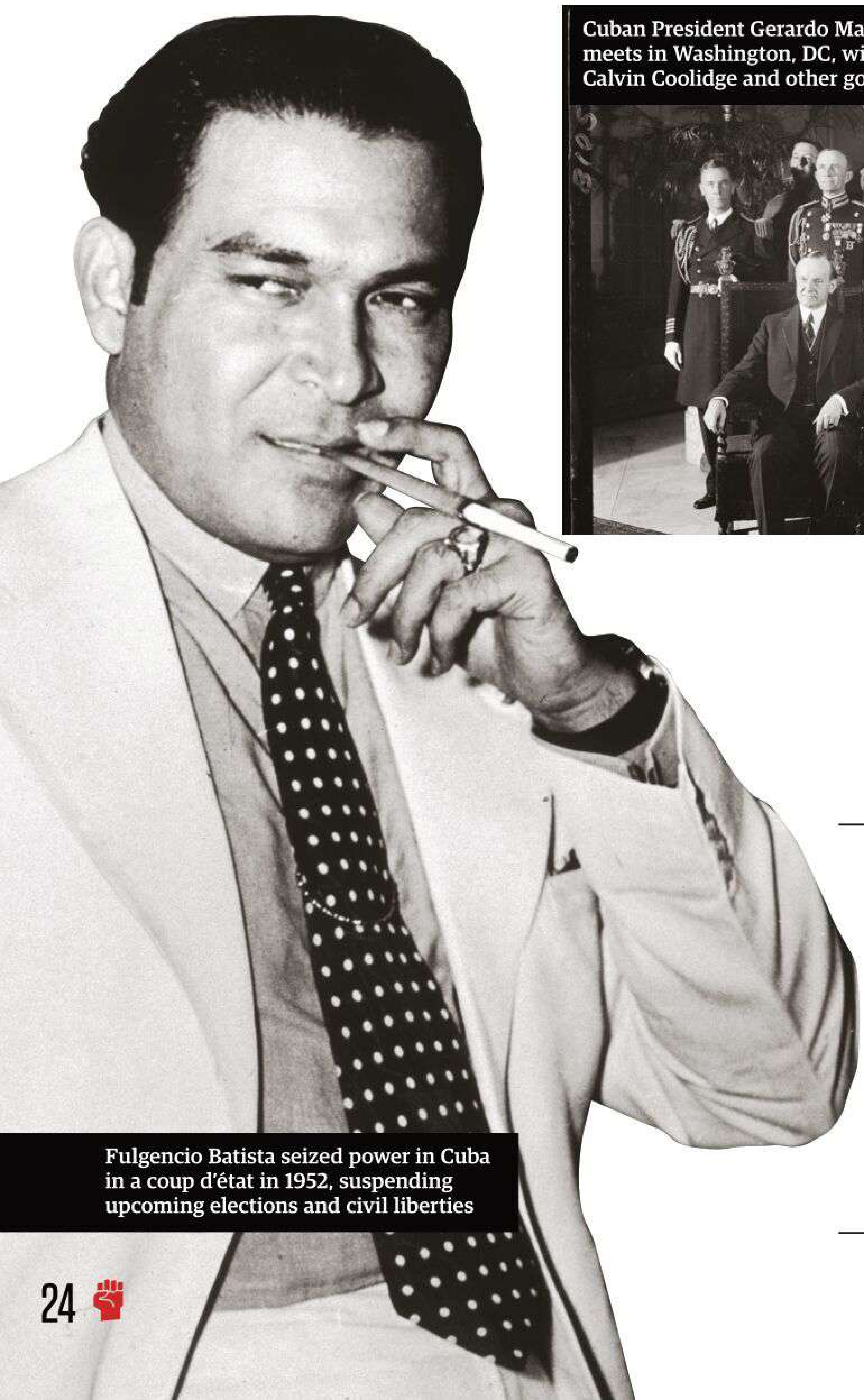
Machado gained popularity quickly within the Cuban political establishment and with the common people. However, by 1928, his power base had begun to erode. Nevertheless, despite the fact that he had promised to serve only one term in office, he announced an election that year and was re-elected president without opposition. Although he remained in office, Machado grew increasingly unpopular in the wake of the stock market crash in 1929 and with the onset of the Great Depression.

A clandestine terrorist group known as ABC mounted violent attacks across the country, and students who billed themselves as the 'Generation of 1930' took to the streets in large numbers to protest Machado's repressive authority.

In 1933, the United States intervened once again. Ambassador Sumner Welles initiated an effort to mediate among the parties, including the government, student and workers' groups, and even the terrorist element of ABC. The effort engendered a belief that Machado was weak, and civil unrest began to boil over. Workers went on strike, and the army forced Machado to relinquish power that summer. In the midst of chaos, Welles flexed American muscle once again and turned to Fulgencio Batista, a well-connected sergeant of the Cuban Army. Batista ousted President Ramón Grau San Martín, a college professor who headed a coalition known as the Pentarchy of 1933, in the Revolt of the Sergeants. Batista controlled the military and ruled Cuba behind the curtain of a succession of puppet presidents until 1940.

Batista ran for president in 1944 and won the election outright. He shocked many observers by advocating the adoption of the progressive Constitution of 1940, allowing fringe elements and even the communists to participate in the government, and then peacefully transitioning from office when his term expired in 1948. Batista left Cuba and lived quietly in Florida and New York, telling reporters once that he felt safer in the United States. He remained in contact with sympathetic officials and military men in Cuba, and was elected to congress in absentia in 1948. By 1952, he decided

During World War II, Batista suggested a joint US-Cuban invasion of Spain to remove fascist dictator Francisco Franco

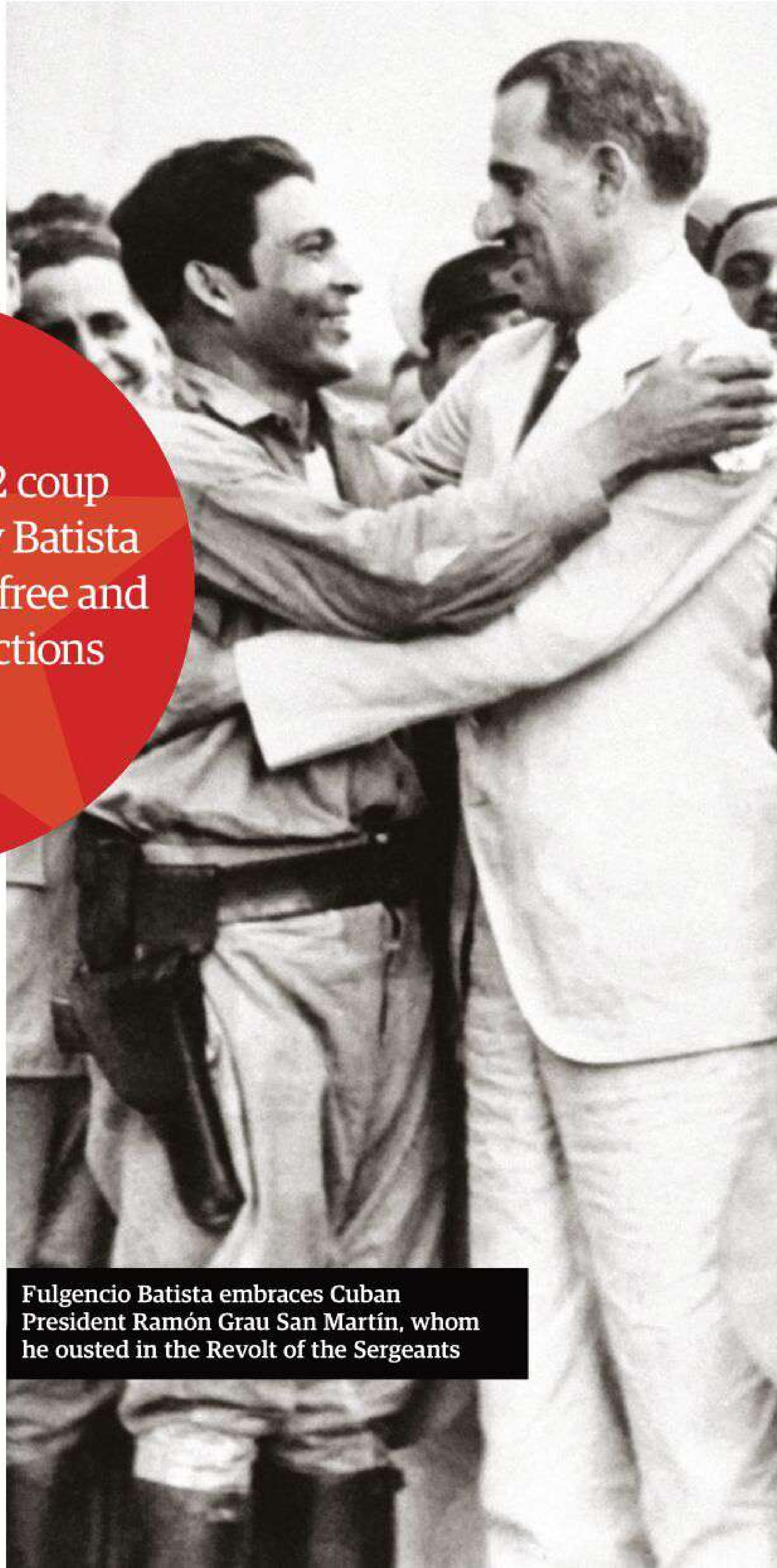


Fulgencio Batista seized power in Cuba in a coup d'état in 1952, suspending upcoming elections and civil liberties

Cuban President Gerardo Machado meets in Washington, DC, with US President Calvin Coolidge and other government officials

The March 1952 coup d'état initiated by Batista ended 12 years of free and democratic elections in Cuba

"The US intervened in Cuba, diplomatically and militarily"



Fulgencio Batista embraces Cuban President Ramón Grau San Martín, whom he ousted in the Revolt of the Sergeants

# SO CLOSE TO THE US

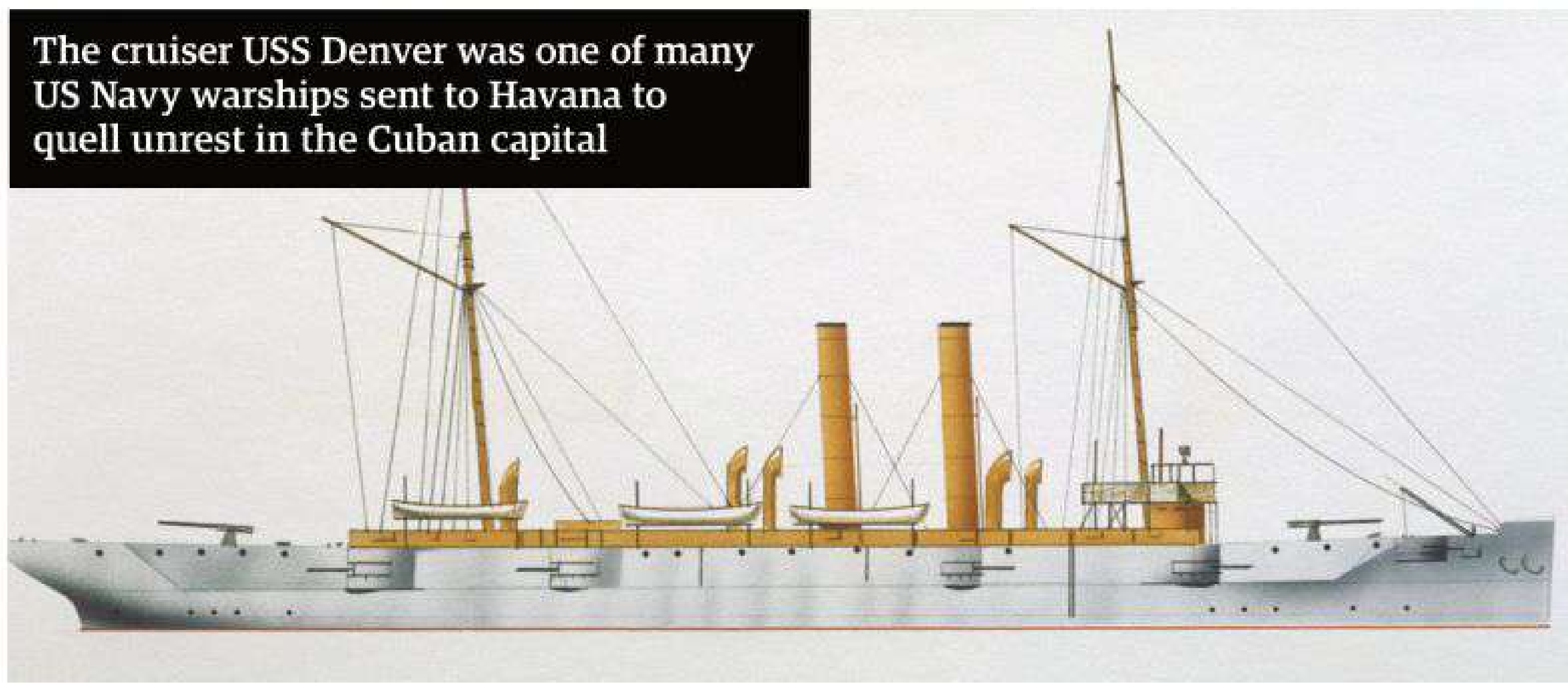
## For many Cubans, the United States bore responsibility for the excesses of Batista's regime, and they openly demonstrated their displeasure

By the mid-1950s, many ordinary Cubans had formed negative opinions of the United States, their powerful neighbour that had influenced the internal and external affairs of the republic since its inception at the turn of the 20th century. Revolutionaries were quick to adopt an anti-American stance as they witnessed continuing support for a succession of ineffective governments plus ongoing interventions to protect American interests under the guise of preserving Cuban democracy.

For many Cubans, the last dram of goodwill for the United States evaporated with the American support of dictator Fulgencio Batista, who seized power in a coup and suspended an election, which he was sure to lose, that had been scheduled for three months later. Nevertheless, the Americans had showered Batista with financial and military aid in tacit approval of his brutal crackdown on personal freedom and civil liberties. By the time high-ranking officials in the US government realised that their man in Havana was a ruthless tyrant, it was too late to mollify public opinion in Cuba.

US policy proved a dismal failure with the coming of the revolution. Such great effort to prevent the spread of communism in the western hemisphere had failed to gain the support of the most important element in Cuba's political landscape – the people.

US under secretary of state Sumner Welles with Fulgencio Batista, before he was president, in 1938


The cruiser USS Denver was one of many US Navy warships sent to Havana to quell unrest in the Cuban capital

Within days of taking power in Cuba, dictator Fulgencio Batista accepts the applause of a friendly audience in Havana

to return to his homeland and seek the presidency again. When he discovered that he was running a distant third in the polls, he took matters into his own hands and fomented a coup d'état.

Batista loyalists deposed President Carlos Prío Socarrás. Ironically, the strongman's second autocratic administration was contradictory to his reform-oriented first term. He outlawed the Communist Party and clamped down hard on restive factions within the populace, particularly action groups of students and workers who were disenchanted perpetually with the state of government. This time, however, they pointed to rampant corruption among government leaders, particularly Batista, who lined his own pockets with illicit profits from the gambling, prostitution and racketeering that were rife in 1950s Cuba.

They decried Batista's association with organised crime and vilified the United States as a source of support for the regime that kidnapped dissenters from their beds, murdered them in the night and displayed their bodies on roadsides as a warning to others.

While the excesses and brutality of Batista's rule incited hatred among the people, a young lawyer named Fidel Castro became filled with revolutionary rage. In just a short time, that anger would ignite an armed opposition that would topple Batista and establish a Marxist government in Cuba by the end of the decade.

> When Batista seized power, the Cuban middle class quickly became disaffected due to rising unemployment and the persecution of political dissenters

© Getty Images

# FULGENCIO BATISTA

A young Batista came to power on a wave of populist support – not unlike the revolutionaries that chased him out of Cuba. So what went wrong?

Written by
**FRANK ARGOTE-FREYRE**

Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar. The very name conjures the image of a failed and corrupt Caribbean dictator, a man who placed personal gain above the needs of his people. He is probably best known for his early morning escape into exile, along with several dozen family members and generals, on 1 January 1959 – paving the way for the triumph of the Cuban Revolution.

Following the insurgency, Batista was depicted as a stooge and a lackey of the US mafia and government by revolutionary journalists and scholars. He occupies a special spot of revulsion in Cuban history books, and his image is on display in the Cretin's Corner (Rincón de Los Cretinos), along with US presidents Reagan and the two Bushes, at the Museum of the Revolution in Havana.

On the face of it, he seems like a run-of-the-mill historical villain, but there is much more to his story than is widely known. Batista was born into abject poverty in eastern Cuba in 1901 to a mixed-race family with a polyglot of Afro-Cuban, Indigenous and European roots. His father was a part-time sugar cane cutter for the United Fruit Company and the family home was a simple thatched hut with a dirt floor. Batista's formal studies were cut short after the death of his mother forced him to work at a variety of odd jobs to help support his three younger brothers.

From this modest beginning, Batista went on to dominate Cuban politics for over 25 years. Starting his career as a stenographer for the military, he worked his way up the ranks. His big political break occurred in the aftermath of the collapse of the US-backed government of President Gerardo Machado in 1933. In the weeks after Machado fled Cuba, the island was plunged into chaos, and opposing political factions engaged in open warfare in the streets.

By this time, Batista was a sergeant in the army and part of a conspiracy of enlisted men to topple another US-backed government. Their efforts succeeded on 4 September 1933 and the uprising, known initially as the Sergeants' Revolt, ushered in Cuba's first revolution of the 20th century – the Revolution of 1933. Astute enough to know that the enlisted men did not have the skills and knowledge to run the government, Batista formed an unlikely alliance with the students and faculty at the University of Havana.

This revolution ushered in a wide range of labour reforms and challenged the United States' dominance of the island – best symbolised by the hated Platt Amendment, which gave the US the right, by treaty, to intervene in Cuban affairs when its interests were at risk. So, Batista started his political

"In the weeks after Machado fled Cuba, the island was plunged into chaos and political factions engaged in open warfare"

**DEFINING MOMENT**

**Revolution of 1933**

With Cuba in chaos, Batista and a group of enlisted military men from an army base in Havana called Camp Columbia decided that it was time for them to take power. Batista quickly brought the students and faculty from the University of Havana on board, and what was originally a revolt turned into a full revolution. They ushered in an era of labour and land reforms.

**4 September 1933**

### DEFINING MOMENT

**A peaceful transfer of power**

After paving the way for a democratic transition and serving as an elected president from 1940 to 1944, Batista allowed a peaceful transfer of power to Ramón Grau San Martín when his selected candidate lost the presidential election in 1944. Once out of power, Batista went on a tour of Latin American countries and proclaimed the virtues of democracy.

**10 October 1944**

Batista once said "My destiny is to carry out revolutions without bloodshed" career as a revolutionary, much reviled by the United States. Some argue that his drift to villainy began in the months following the takeover when he began secret negotiations with the United States to end the presidency of Professor Ramón Grau San Martín.

On the negative side of his ledger, Batista took part in a political coup to remove Grau in January 1934, but still kept all of the ousted president's reforms. The United States even agreed to rescind the Platt Amendment later that year. The revolutionaries, Batista included, deserve considerable credit for securing greater autonomy for Cuba at that time.

> "Although his government gained quick diplomatic recognition, the people of Cuba never accepted him as their legitimate leader"

**DEFINING MOMENT**

**Coup of 1952**

It became apparent during the 1952 presidential campaign that Batista was unlikely to regain the office, so he chose violence and deposed the democratically elected government. This ruined his legacy as a democratic reformer and thrust him into the role of one of Cuba's greatest villains. His unwillingness to relinquish power led to the Cuban Revolution and the death of thousands.

**10 March 1952**

The late 1930s and early 1940s marked the pinnacle of his career and the closest he came to being perceived as a hero on and off the island. In 1936, Batista, now a colonel, initiated a rural education programme led by the military. The programme emphasised literacy and public health and as a result, over 1,000 schools were built in isolated regions across the island. In some ways, this resembled the literacy campaign championed by Fidel Castro in the early 1960s. This effort included a campaign to provide better treatment facilities for those suffering from tuberculosis, a disease that had seemingly claimed the life of his younger brother. Batista's rural education programme catapulted him to popularity, and he began to evolve into a civilian political leader. He even began wearing suits instead of his usual military uniforms.

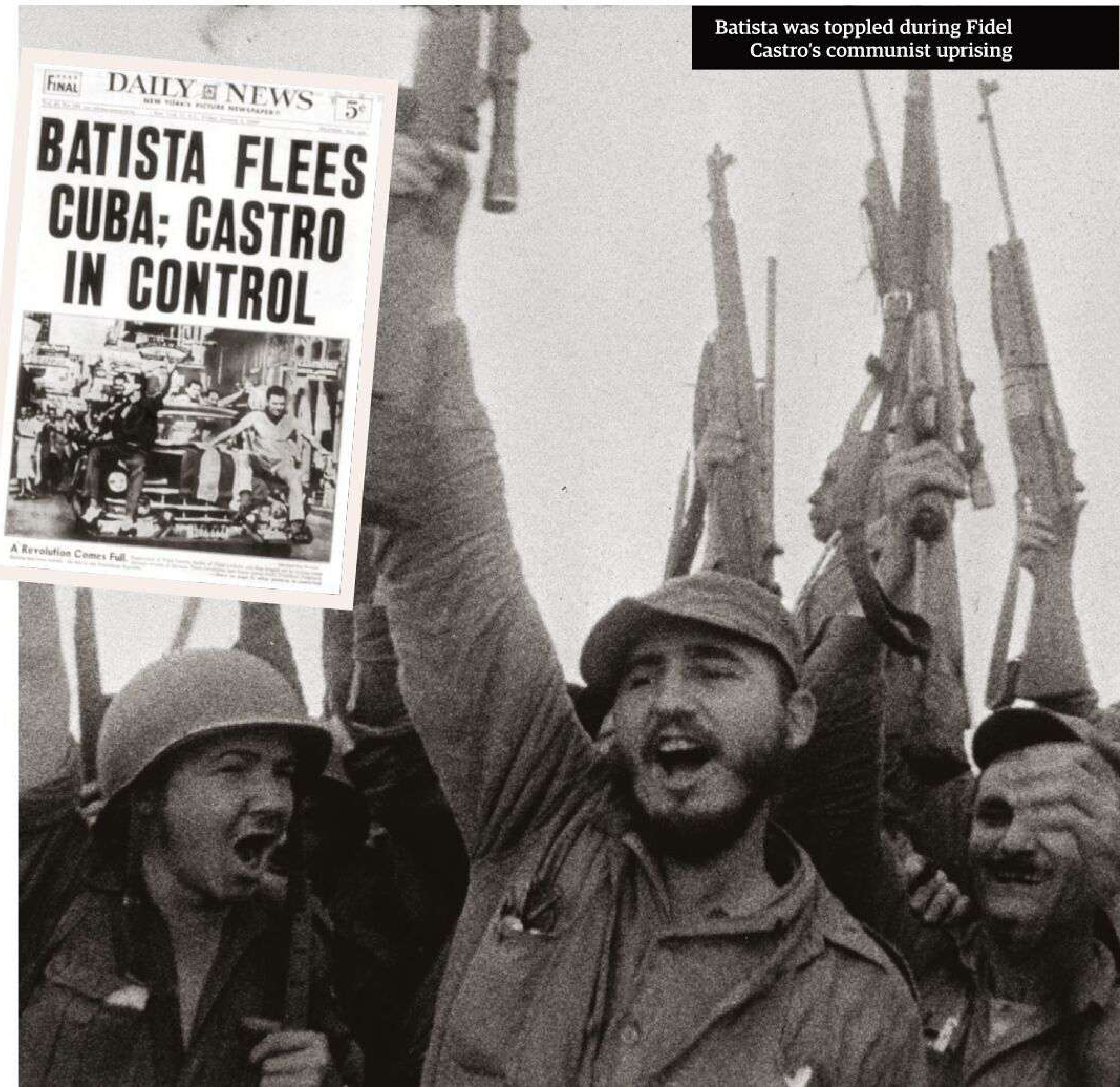
But his rural education programme met with opposition from the then president, Miguel Mariano Gómez, and when the two clashed, Batista used his political and military ties to have Gómez impeached and removed from office. In addition to the rural education programme, Batista arguably aided the cause of civil rights on the island by racially integrating the officer corps of the Cuban military, which had been dominated by Cubans of European descent prior to 1933.

In 1939, Batista took two dramatic steps on his path to becoming a civilian leader. He allowed a Constitutional Convention to draft a new constitution – even when the delegates he backed were defeated – and he decided to resign as a military leader in late 1939 so that he could run for the presidency in 1940 against his old nemesis Grau. The election was one of the fairest in Cuban history and Batista won, handily. He served as president of Cuba during most of World War II and he even managed to secure a series of infrastructure improvements from the United States in return for Cuban support of the war effort.

His greatest moment came in defeat. The new Cuban Constitution prevented him from seeking a second consecutive four-year presidential term in 1944 and there was widespread speculation that he would not allow a fair election. Instead, he backed a candidate – and when that candidate lost to Grau San Martín, he did not interfere with the transfer of power. In late October 1944, Batista handed power over to his archrival and left on an extended Latin American tour. Throughout the continent he was hailed as a great leader and the man who had fostered democracy on the island nation.

If his career had ended in 1945, the designation of hero would be appropriate – but his darkest moments were yet to come. After several years in self-imposed exile in Daytona Beach, Florida, Batista

Colonel Batista in the late 1930s



Batista was toppled during Fidel Castro's communist uprising

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BATISTA FLEES CUBA: CASTRO IN CONTROL

A Revolution Comes Full.

CAMAGUEY
AS VILLAS
GUAC ABO

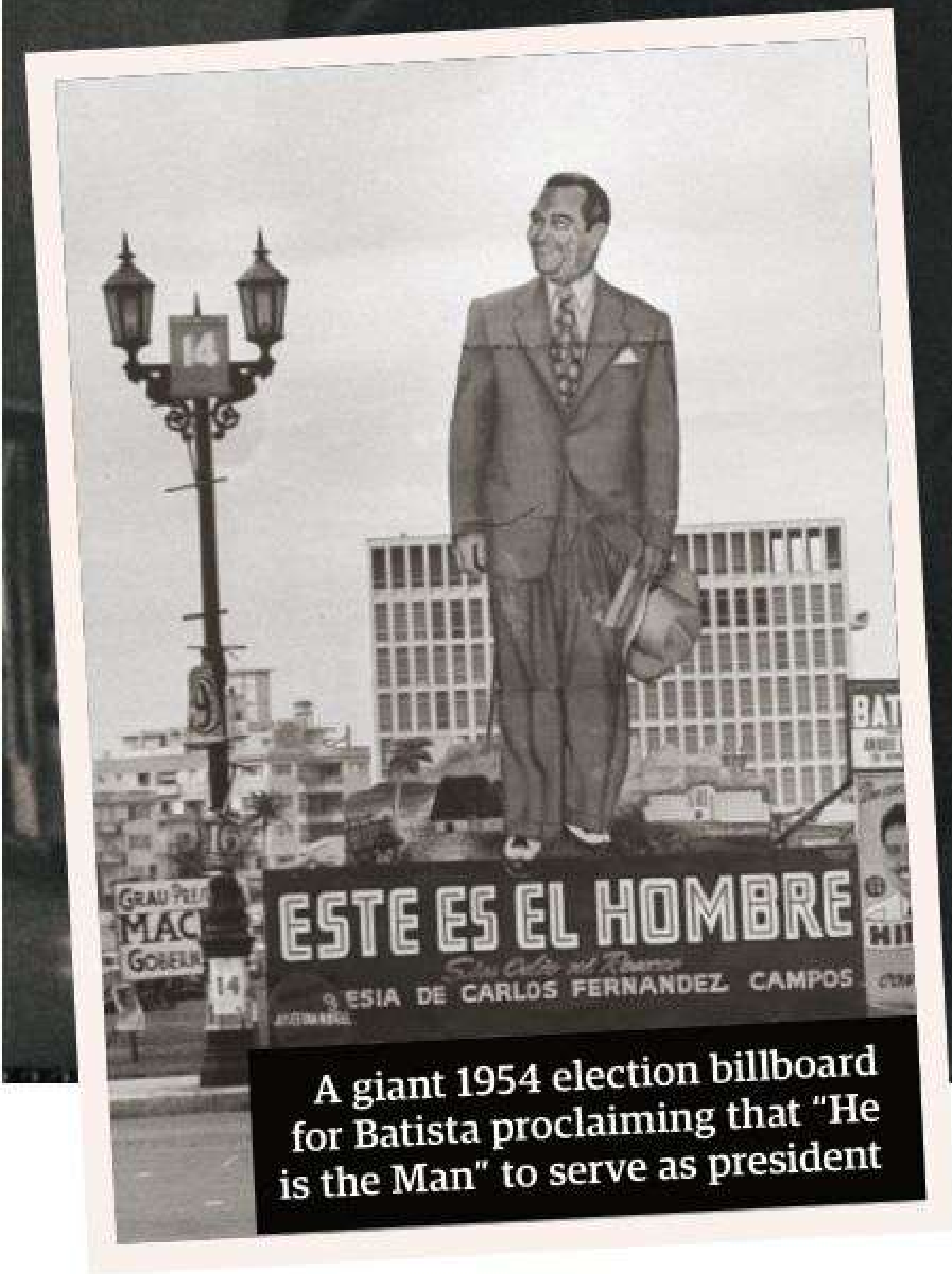
Batista in front of his war map during the Cuban Revolution in the late 1950s

## DEFINING MOMENT

**Flight into exile**

All his political acumen could not provide him with legitimacy. In late 1958, after a series of defeats and a mounting urban and rural guerrilla campaign, he decided to flee. His departure in the early hours of 1 January 1959 left the island in chaos. Revolutionary forces led by Castro quickly established control. In the turmoil following the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, millions of Cubans have gone into exile.

**1 January 1959**



A giant 1954 election billboard for Batista proclaiming that "He is the Man" to serve as president

was elected to a seat in the Cuban Senate in 1948 as a prelude to a second presidential run in 1952. His popularity faded and public opinion polls indicated he was unlikely to win the presidency but instead of accepting that outcome, Batista tapped into his old military contacts and toppled the democratically elected government on 10 March 1952.

As if playing a role in a Greek tragedy, Batista destroyed his life's work by seizing power in a coup. It is at this point that the Batista we know emerged. Although his government gained quick diplomatic recognition, the people of Cuba never accepted him as their legitimate leader. He tried to couch the coup in constitutional terms by keeping large parts of the governing document in place but few recognised him as the rightful president.

At first, Batista claimed that his rise to power was temporary and that he would quickly re-establish the normal order. But he clung to power for nearly seven years – even running unopposed in the elections of 1954. Civilian leaders formed political coalitions to negotiate his peaceful departure but all of their efforts were ultimately unsuccessful. As political opposition to his government intensified and a rural and urban guerrilla movement emerged, he responded with ever-greater violence. Political opponents were frequently tortured and their mutilated bodies were discarded in public areas to quell dissent.

As violence escalated, so did political corruption. Batista did not invent the institutional corruption that pervaded Cuban politics but he took it to unprecedented new levels. It worked in several ways. Major building and infrastructure projects required approval at several levels of government and a bribe was frequently required to push a project through to completion. Gambling in its many forms, from the national lottery to the casinos, was controlled in Havana by government officials, who were kept happy with backhanders from casino operators and a small number of mobsters from the US. Corruption went all the way to the top and Batista is known to have used it for personal gain. Some claim that he may have amassed a fortune exceeding $100 million as a result of corruption.

Batista's actions plunged Cuba into a civil war with Fidel Castro and his fellow revolutionaries. Despite the impact on the island, Batista held onto power as long as he could. It was not until mid-December 1958 that he decided to abandon Cuba – and only after he discovered that some of his generals appeared to be plotting against him. When he fled, he left the island in chaos and closed the door of democracy for generations to come. Hundreds of his mid- and low-level supporters were later executed by the Castro government.

He lived out the rest of his life, till 1973, in relative luxury in Portugal and Spain, and he wrote a number of books trying to reclaim and recast his legacy. He argued that he brought about economic development in Cuba, but conveniently never fully addressed his unconstitutional power grab.

The second half of his career clearly places Batista in the villain category, but it is interesting to note that there were two distinct Batistas. The earlier one laid claim to a revolutionary populist pedigree as a mixed-race child of the poorest of the poor. He made significant contributions to the rural poor of Cuba and, perhaps most importantly, paved the way for a fragile democracy. However, his lust for power destroyed his achievements and the people of Cuba are still living with that today.

★

> "As political opposition intensified and a rural and urban guerrilla movement emerged, he responded with ever-greater violence"

★

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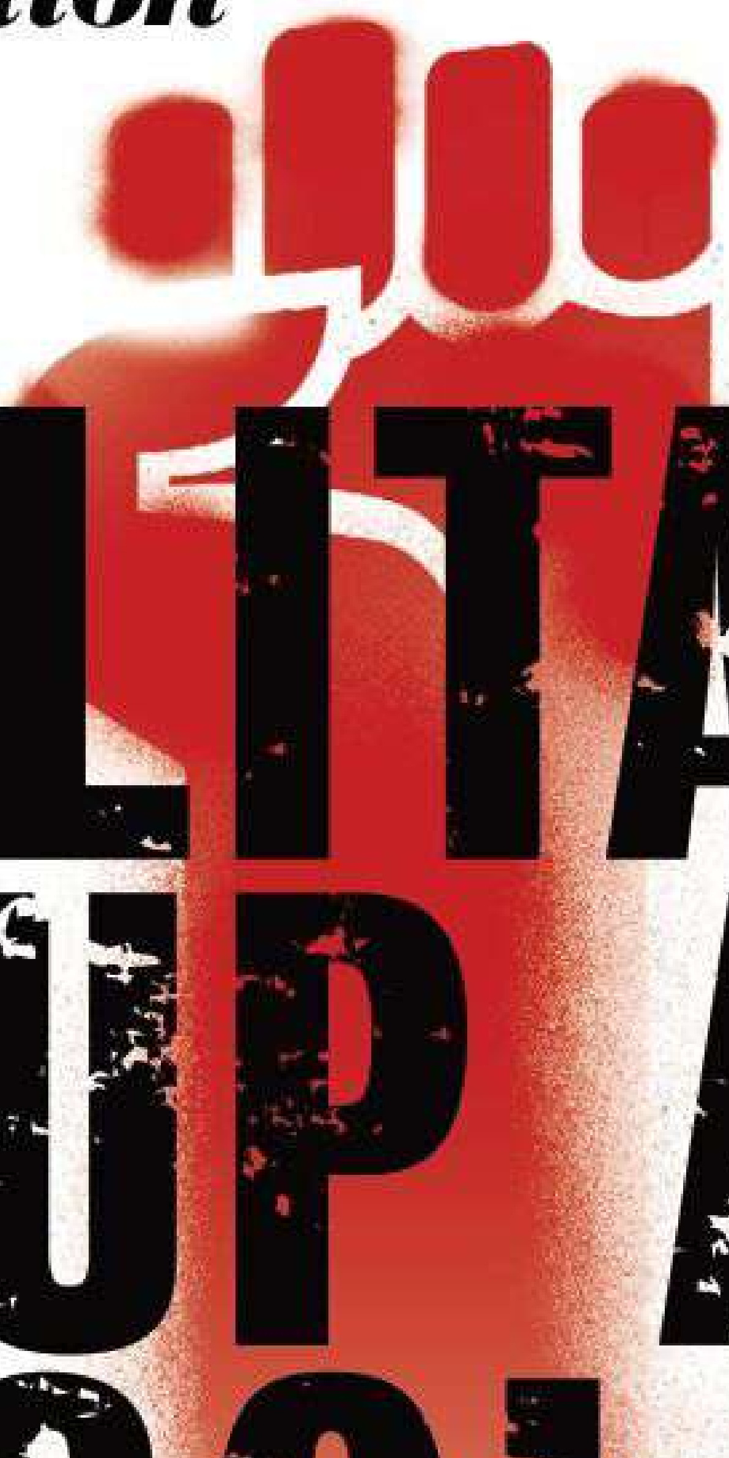


# MILITARY COUP AND ABSOLUTE POWER

Fulgencio Batista was no stranger to political intrigue and corruption when he seized power in Cuba, in 1952, and he ruled with an iron fist

Written by
**MIKE HASKEW**

When Fulgencio Batista acceded to the Cuban presidency for the second time, his reputation as a political strongman, leader of the army and shrewd peddler of influence for personal gain became widely known among the people. Previously, he had led the country during the early-1940s, but for eight years he had been in self-imposed exile in the United States.

Nevertheless, he lived in the lap of luxury, spending time at his mansion in Daytona Beach, Florida, and the posh Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City. During that time he remained a familiar figure in the Cuban political arena and maintained ties with the country's military establishment, while also fostering connections in American industry and even with organised crime in the United States. He was also a friend of the US government. These relationships actually stretched back two decades to his first sojourn as the island nation's strongman.

Eventually, sensing that the time had come, Batista determined to run once again for president of Cuba. However, despite his strong ties to the army, labour leaders, and Cuban and American officials, he had no solid political base. Undeterred, probably since he had never really counted on the people for support, instead being well-versed in the tactics of coercion and brute force, he orchestrated a coup d'état. By late 1951, he had organised the United Action Coalition and was in a three-man contest for the country's highest office. Opposed by Roberto Agramonte of the Partido Ortodoxo and Partido Auténtico candidate Carlos Hevia, he read dismal forecasts of the election's outcome and realised that he was running a distant third. Drastic action was necessary, and he did not hesitate.

On 10 March 1952, elements within the army loyal to Batista seized major military installations across the country. Immediately, the new leader forced retiring President Carlos Prío Socarrás to resign. Batista cancelled the elections that had been scheduled for three months later, suspended the Constitution of 1940 in favour of a 'Statute of Government' that dissolved all political parties, and announced that he would rule Cuba until elections were held in November 1953. Within days, several nations recognised the new government. In the United States, the administration of President Dwight D Eisenhower did so on 27 March, believing Batista represented stability, that he would protect American industrial and business interests in Cuba, and that he would serve as a bulwark against a potential communist political beachhead in the western hemisphere.

After Batista took drastic actions to curb civil liberties in Cuba, explaining that his new Statute of Government preserved the "progressive and

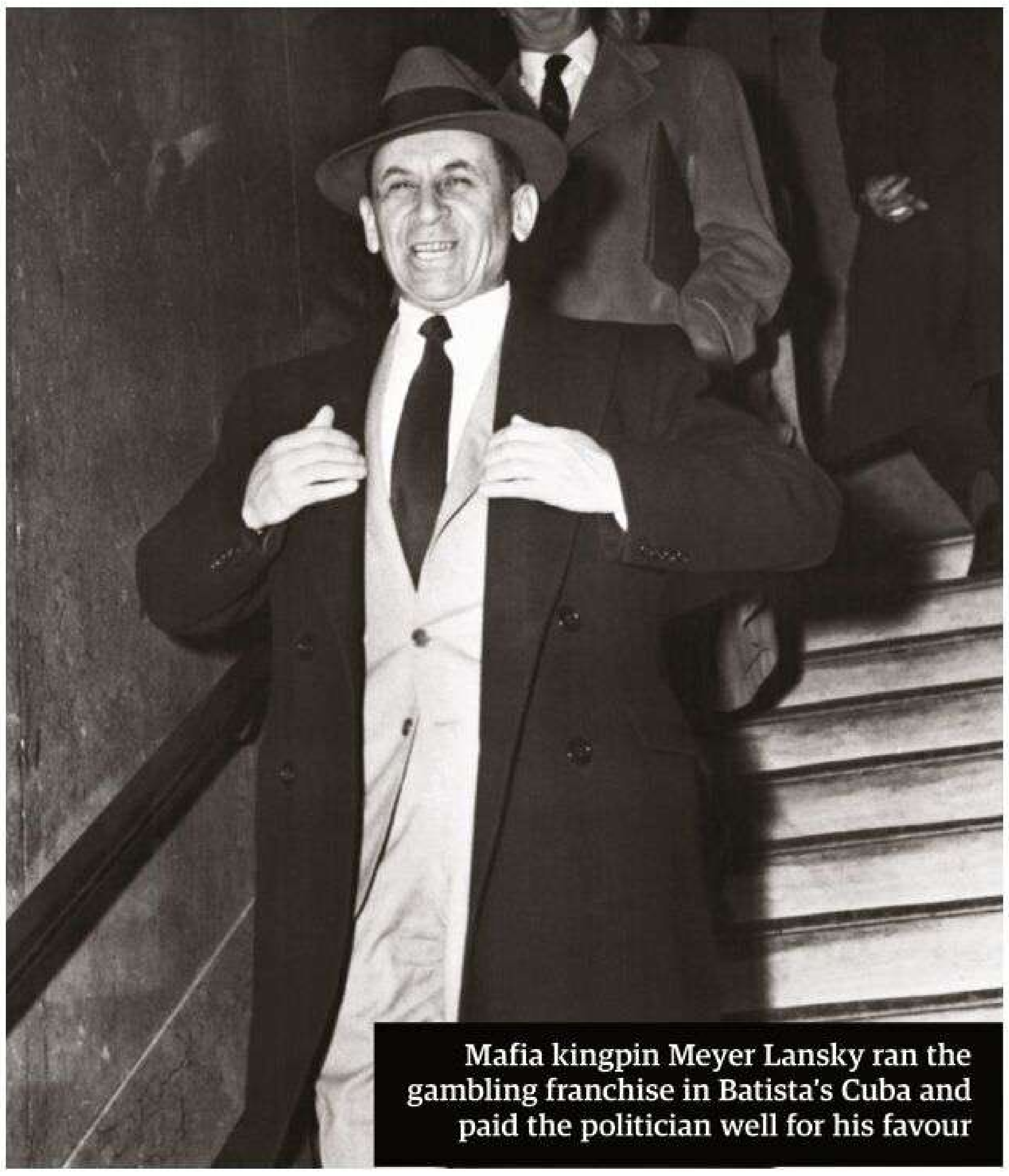
"Drugs, gambling, racketeering and the sex trade flourished, and Batista received substantial kickbacks in return"

Actor George Raft was a partner of mobster Santo Trafficante with an ownership interest in the Capri Hotel in Havana

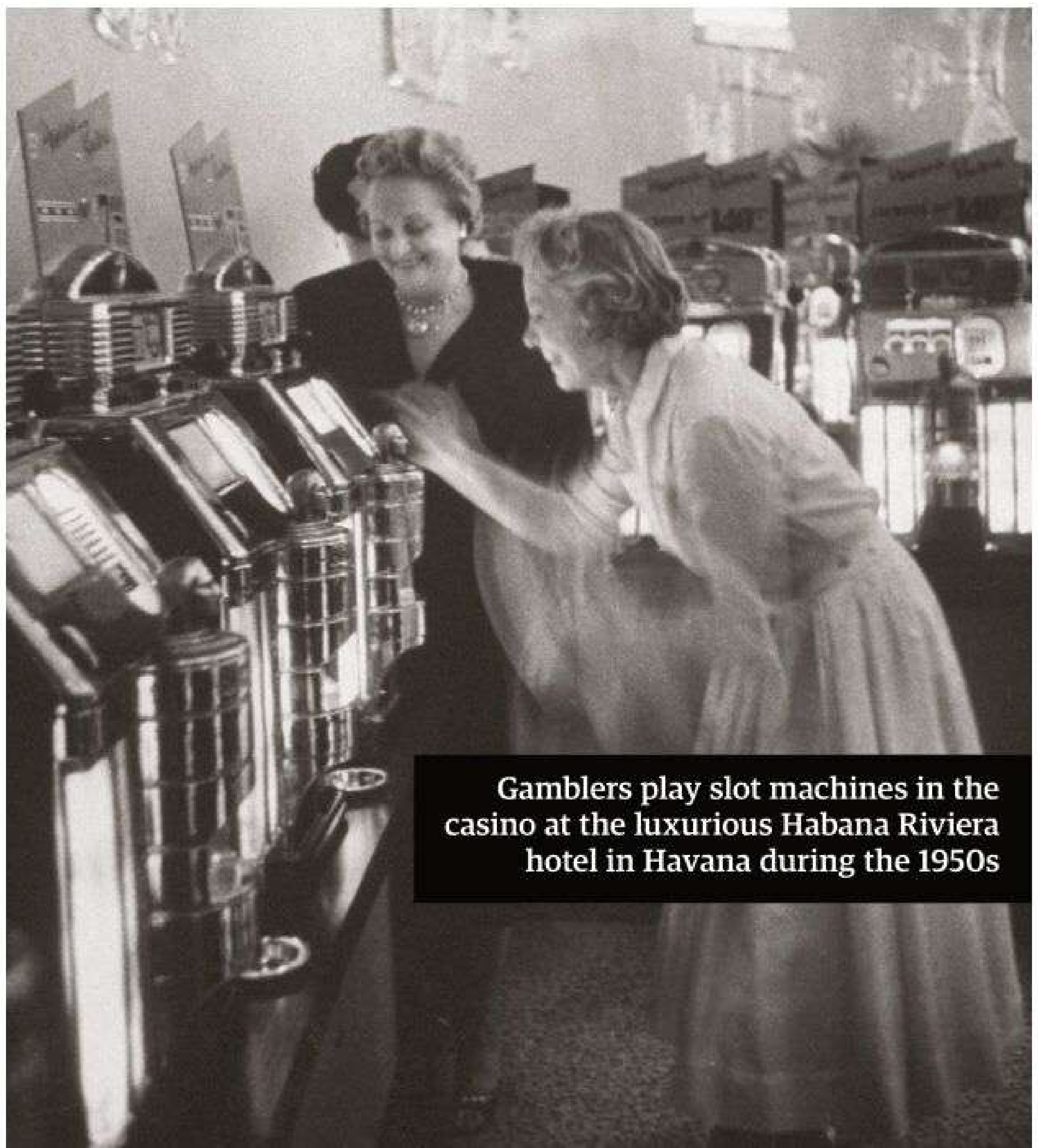
Leftist politician Manuel Urrutia Lleó prays amid bodies of rebels slain after their return to Cuba from exile on 26 July 1953

Marta Fernández Batista, second wife of Fulgencio Batista, was involved in skimming hotel casino profits and other corrupt activities

A confident Fulgencio Batista meets the press. Batista curtailed personal freedoms in Cuba and restricted news reporting



Mafia kingpin Meyer Lansky ran the gambling franchise in Batista's Cuba and paid the politician well for his favour



Gamblers play slot machines in the casino at the luxurious Habana Riviera hotel in Havana during the 1950s democratic essence" of the Constitution of 1940, some Americans became disillusioned with the course he appeared to chart. Regardless, the US government supported his regime with financial grants and military aid.

Despite the fact that the Cuban economy was one of the most highly developed in Latin America, with a gross domestic product equal to that of Italy and a substantial upward trend in wages for factory workers, there were signs of economic weakness and exploitation. The average Cuban family only earned about $6 per week, while unemployment hovered around 15 to 20 per cent of the workforce. At least one-third of the population lived in poverty, without the basics of electric power and running water. Batista's policies would only widen the economic chasm.

Many ordinary Cubans were dismayed by the measures Batista had taken to seize power. They spoke out against the clampdown on dissent and opposition. They were enraged by his support for wealthy landowners and those who operated sugar plantations. They watched corruption spread like a cancer throughout his administration and recoiled as his ties to organised crime brought the frenzied development of beachfront hotels and casinos to Havana as American tourists descended on the island in great numbers.

Batista opened wide the door to Cuba, inviting American investment and, along with it, the vice and underworld machinations of organised crime. He was, without doubt, culpable in the event, opening his own pocketbook in the process. He awarded lucrative contracts to American companies for the construction of new hotels and gambling dens and received substantial kickbacks in return. Through his connections, he helped bring famous American performers to the stages of Havana's booming nightclub scene. The capital became a mecca for pleasure-seeking tourists, and in a wave of hedonism, drugs, gambling, racketeering and the sex trade flourished.

While encouraging a steady stream of American investment, Batista positioned himself and his government cronies to reap a windfall of illegal payments and profits from the burgeoning influence of organised crime and the goodwill of the US government. He offered to match any investment in a new hotel of more than $1 million with an equal grant from the Cuban national treasury to facilitate the project – and along with it the obligatory gambling licence. As the betting industry grew in the island nation, Batista's longtime friend and Mafia kingpin Meyer Lansky ruled the casino operations across Cuba with a reckless disregard for the law or any interference from the government.

Routinely, Batista collected his share of the profits derived from hotels, gambling, drugs and prostitution. He exacted tribute payments in exchange for turning a blind eye to the corruption that was rife in his own government. His bagmen made the circuit weekly, collecting as much as ten

Batista awarded a ten-year tax exemption and waived the taxes on equipment and furnishings brought into Cuba for new hotels

Exuding charm, Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista greets his country's ambassador from Mexico at a formal gathering

RHC
RADIO CADENA
UNION RADIO
CMQ
After his seizure of power via military coup in 1952, Fulgencio Batista addresses the Cuban nation by radio

Fulgencio Batista and his wife greet former president Andrés Domingo Morales del Castillo during a commemoration of the 1952 coup

Batista addresses a huge military crowd after seizing the presidency in 1952

Cuba's capital city of Havana became known as the 'Latin Las Vegas' during the 1950s heyday of the gambling industry

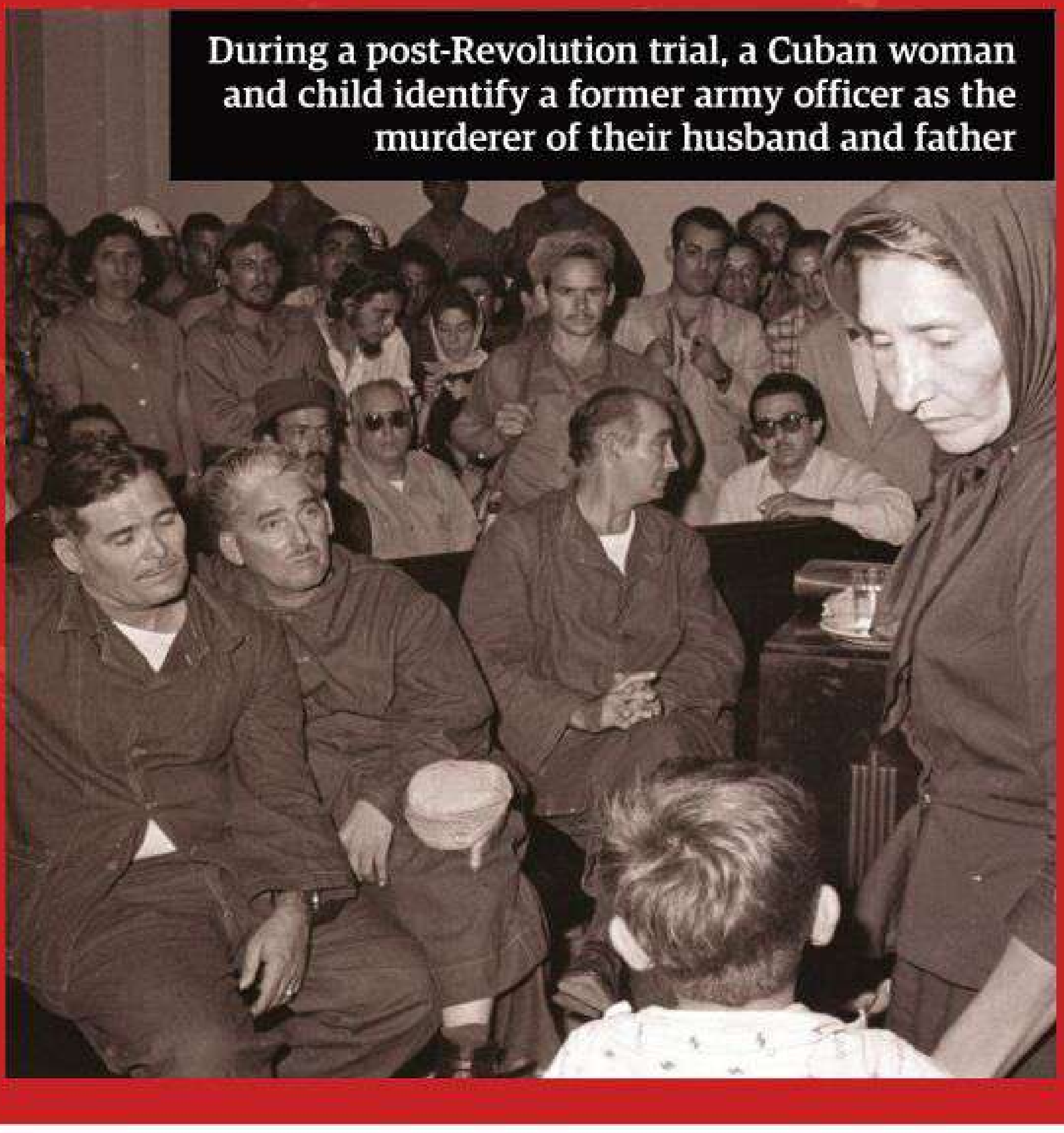
# A CUBAN REIGN OF TERROR

## Dictator Fulgencio Batista resorted to brutal tactics in suppressing those elements that opposed his government in Cuba

In the wake of the coup d'état that swept him into power in the spring of 1952, dictator Fulgencio Batista led one of the most repressive regimes in the western hemisphere. During seven years as Cuba's dictator, he is believed to have been directly or indirectly responsible for the murders of as many as 20,000 Cuban citizens. Many of these reprehensible acts were committed simply to quash opposition, while others were in reprisal for destabilising attacks launched by dissenters or guerrilla bands that sought to topple his US-backed government.

After suspending the Constitution of 1940 and stripping virtually every civil liberty from the Cuban people, Batista systematically sought to exterminate opposition. His sadistic police force and the newly formed Cuban rural guard embarked on nocturnal raids, kidnapping individuals from their homes or off the streets, brutally torturing and often murdering them as warnings to others inclined to oppose Batista. During one particularly bloody purge, in December 1956, Batista's henchmen abducted and murdered several men and then dumped their bodies along roadways or in fields, even hanging them from trees. The killing spree was dubbed 'Operation Christmas Present'.

In the autumn of 1957, members of Fidel Castro's 26th of July Movement boarded the yacht Corinthia and killed Colonel Fermín Cowley Gallegos, the leader of the Christmas murder squad. Within hours, Batista ordered tanks and troops of the Cuban Army to detain hundreds of citizens and ruthlessly interrogate them. Six members of the 26th of July Movement were executed. Batista's brutality only served to hasten the fall of his corrupt regime, and the cost in lives was tragic.


**During a post-Revolution trial, a Cuban woman and child identify a former army officer as the murderer of their husband and father**

per cent of the take of mob boss Santo Trafficante's operations, including the casinos at the Sevilla-Biltmore, Commodoro, Capri and Deauville hotels and the Sans Souci Cabaret. He skimmed up to 30 per cent of the take from Lansky's popular casinos, such as those at the Montmartre Club, Hotel Nacional, and the glittering Habana Riviera. Rumours circulated that Lansky was regularly making substantial deposits to Batista's personal accounts held at Swiss banks, far from the prying eyes of any opponents.

> Before returning to his native country, Batista ran for a seat in the Cuban senate in 1948 and won

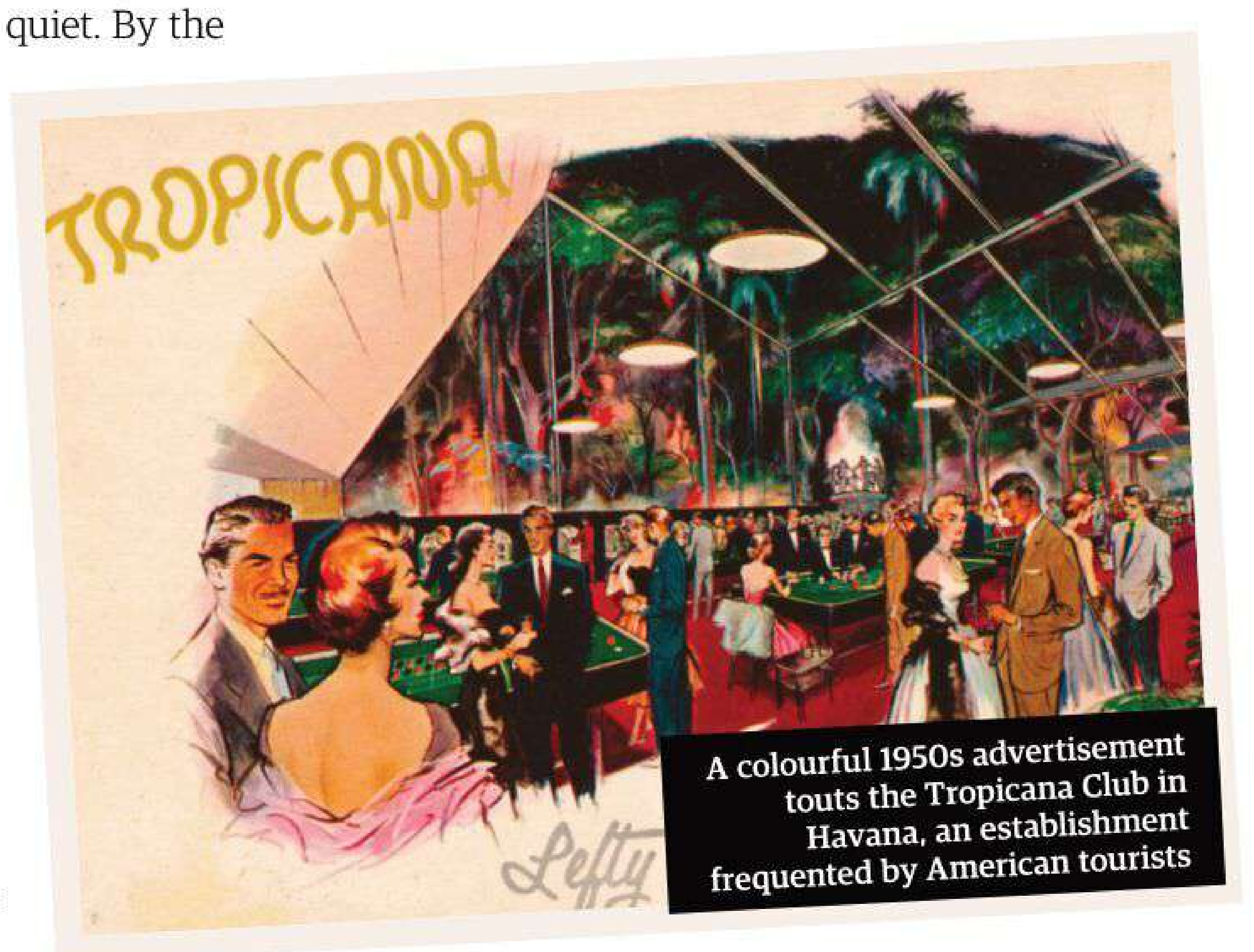
At the same time that Batista mounted his run for president of Cuba, a young leftist revolutionary named Fidel Castro had also sought election to the nation's congress. Castro became one of many disillusioned Cubans who scorned the excesses of the Batista regime and along with them the partnership that the dictator had forged with the United States. Anti-government groups took shape, and their numbers swelled during the early months of Batista's rule. Acts of violence and civil disobedience brought unrest to the streets of Cuban cities, and in turn the dictator took steps to quell the potential uprising that was on the horizon.

Meanwhile, the US government, too late perhaps, had begun to realise that its support for Batista was actually a liability. Caught between the repressive tactics of the dictator's police forces and the military, there was the stark economic reality that the US was heavily invested publicly and privately in Cuba. By the end of the 1950s, American corporations and individuals controlled approximately $1 billion worth of investments there, including a quarter of the country's bank deposits, 40 per cent of its sugar production facilities, half of its railroads, 80 per cent of its public utilities, and 90 per cent of its mining interests.

Batista's secret police moved to swiftly silence dissenting voices, threatening, beating and murdering those who refused to be quiet. By the mid-1950s, bombs were being detonated in Havana's streets, and during one terrifying week, at least seven exploded in the capital, shaking both the government and population. Students marched and workers went on strike. Eventually, the entire eastern province of Oriente was deemed to be in a state of unrest, defiant even though the authorities continually cracked down on opposition leaders.

Just over a year after Batista seized power, Castro was intent on striking a blow against the repressive regime and overthrowing the corrupt dictator. On 26 July 1953, he led an ill-conceived attack on the Moncada Barracks, a military installation near the country's second-largest city, Santiago de Cuba.

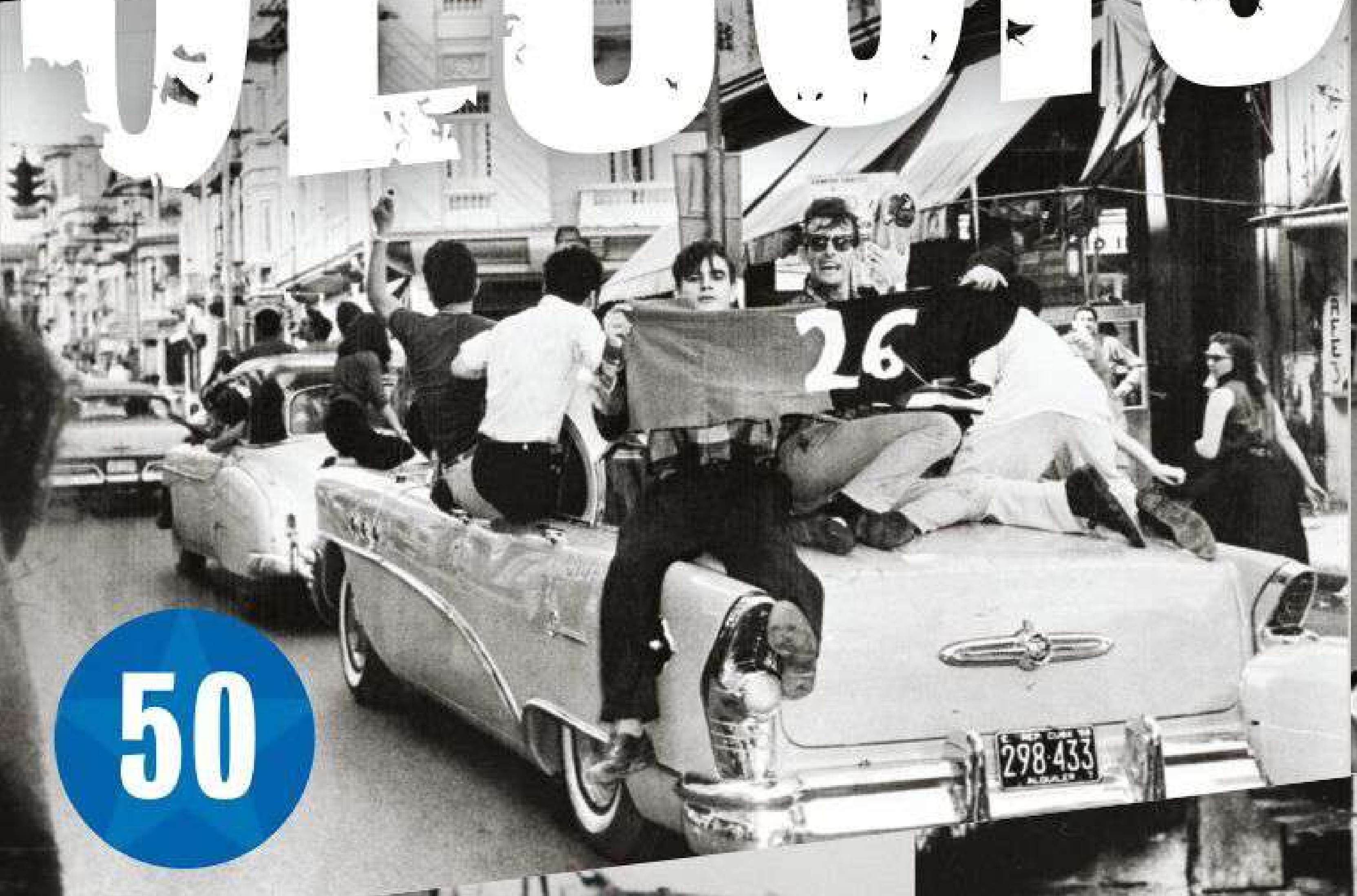
The attack failed, and Castro was later arrested after he fled along with a handful of survivors. An enraged Batista ordered General Martin Tamayo to execute ten rebels for every soldier who died in the attempt. The presidential edict came to be known as the 'Ten to One Law', and 59 people were killed in addition to those rebels lost in the Moncada Barracks assault. The reprisal death toll among dissenters reached 190, and the seeds of revolution were sown. Batista retained power, but he had become the architect of his own demise.

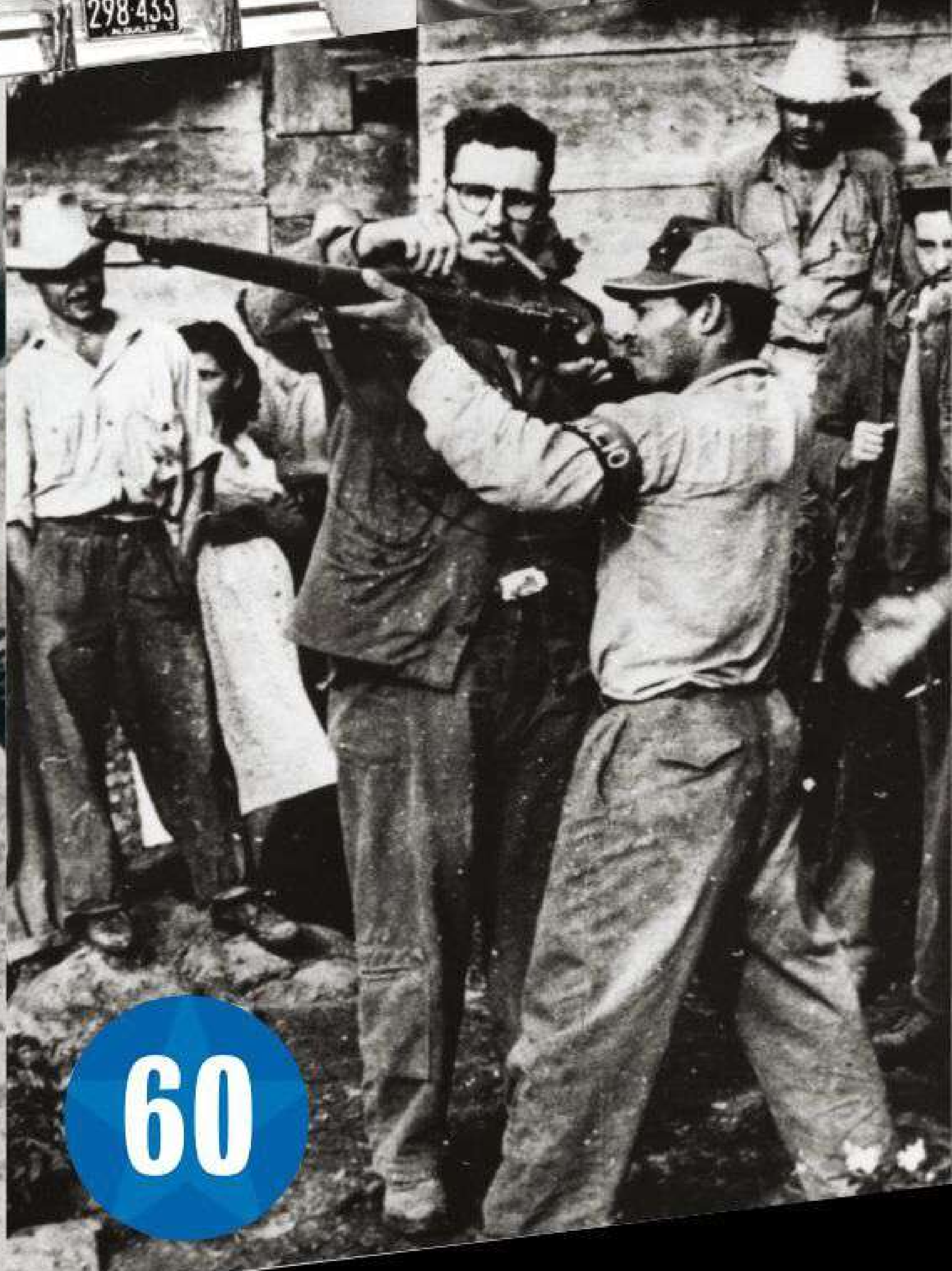


**A colourful 1950s advertisement touts the Tropicana Club in Havana, an establishment frequented by American tourists**

© Getty Images

# ¡VIVA LA REVOLUCIÓN!





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How Castro's early life and experiences led him down the path of revolution

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Aiming to kick-start a revolution, Castro led a doomed attack on the Moncada Barracks

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The story of Fidel Castro's revolutionary 26th of July Movement

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The friendship between Fidel Castro and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara would come to define the revolution

The key events of the revolution, from the failed attack at Moncada to the guerrilla war

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Fidel Castro's insurgency in the mountains of south-eastern Cuba has gone down in folklore as it laid the foundations for revolution

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The massive uprising of Cuba's menfolk may have led to revolution but the significance of the fighting women of Cuba cannot be overlooked

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Batista fled Cuba as Castro and the rebels claimed a number of stunning victories

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The Mob built a gambling empire in Cuba, only to see it come crashing down when Fidel Castro came to power

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The remarkable and radical life of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, hero of the Cuban Revolution

# RISE OF A REBEL

While Fidel Castro portrayed himself as a revolutionary, his early life suggests a man who would always have kicked against restraint

Written by
**EDOARDO ALBERT**

It was towards the end of his second year at Havana University that the young Fidel Castro got the message. It was from one of the city's police chiefs who, in the chaos of 1940s Cuba, were as much political enforcers as agents of the law. Now one of them was telling Castro, in no uncertain terms, to get away from the university and stay away. This was no idle threat; nor was it made to stop Castro completing his law degree.

Havana University, through the vagaries of the Cuban Constitution of the time, was officially off limits to both police and army, making it a hotbed of competing political factions, all of which used it as a place to store arms and to plot. Whichever was the most powerful student faction took over control of the university, funding itself through the sale of textbooks or exam papers (particularly before the exams were actually taken).

While the police were not allowed on campus, Cuban police chiefs made use of the most violent university students to carry out raids, reprisals and assassinations. The one who had issued that threat to Castro did double duty as officer of the law and enforcer for the Movimiento Socialista Revolucionario (MSR), which was allied to government officials - indeed, the government had installed a member of the MSR as head of the secret police. The message was to stay away. Coming from such a source, it was both serious and likely to be followed through. For Castro, to return to Havana University would be to put his life in serious danger.

Castro recalled later how he had gone down to the beach to think. Standing there alone, staring out to sea, he examined the situation. By returning to the university he would be putting himself in great personal danger. Who was he, the illegitimate son of a Spanish immigrant, to pit himself against the ruthless and well-connected families that controlled the political life of the island? However, to give up and leave would mean surrendering to threats and abandoning his ideals. The decision made, he went back - but he went back armed. According to his later recollection, the three years he spent at the university were the most dangerous of his life; riskier even than the later guerrilla war he would fight in the mountains of Cuba.

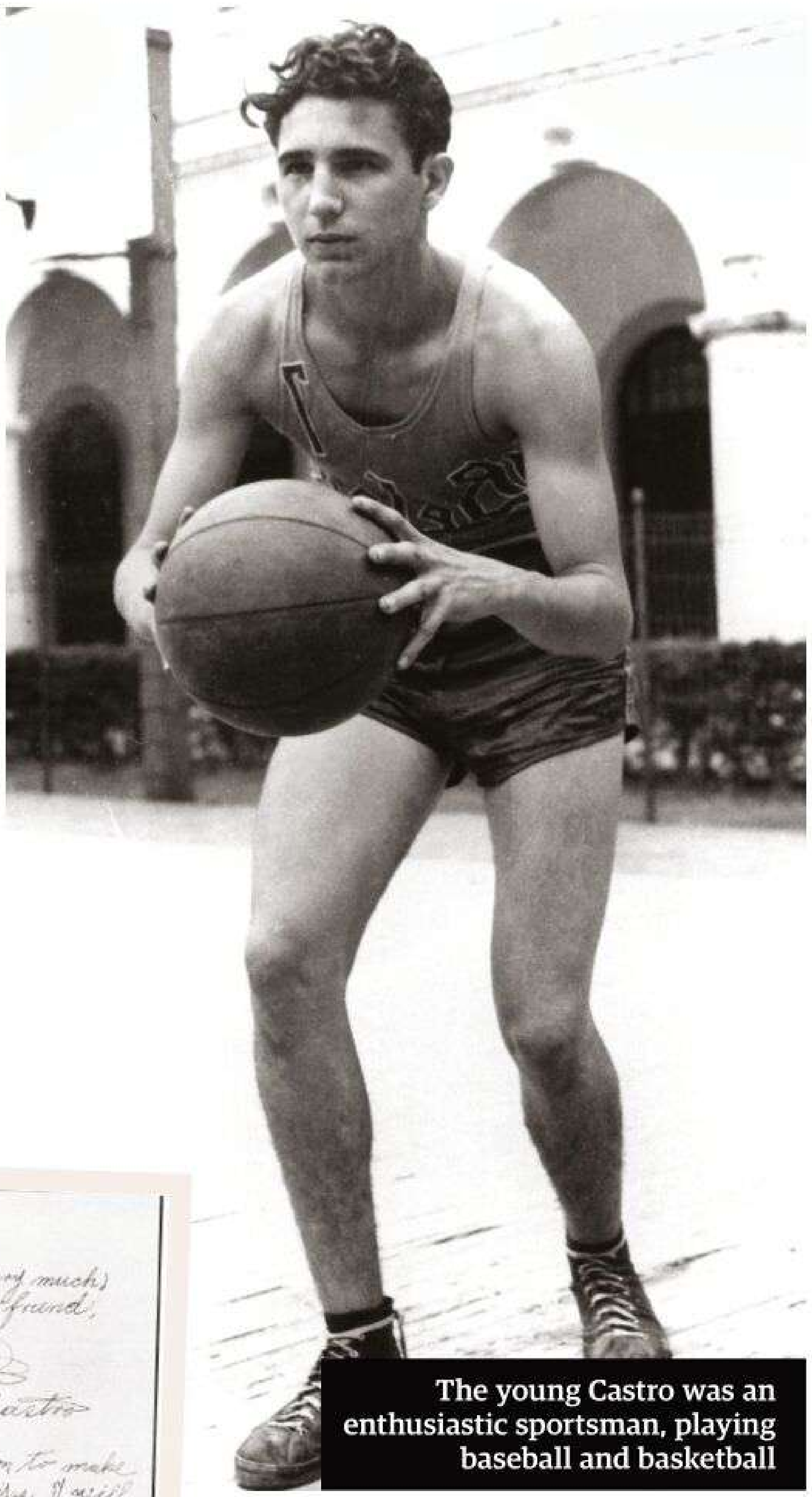
What were the ideals that Castro was willing to risk his life for? As he stood on the beach staring outwards at the sea and inwards into his soul, they were still inchoate: little more than a romantic notion of national rebirth. These were the common ideals of Cuba's student activists, for they were all well versed in the history of the island and its still unfinished struggle for liberation. The history of that fight was soaked in the blood of martyrs and made bitter by the tears of experience: each revolution had first succeeded only to later fail by dint of the revolutionaries becoming in their turn what they had despised and deposed. The challenge, and ultimately perhaps the tragedy, of Fidel Castro, was not to become that which he had set out to overthrow.

> Castro was 17 when his father formally accepted him as his son, at which point he changed his surname from Ruz, his mother's family name, to Castro

There was not much in Castro's early life to suggest that he would become the crucial figure in the final phase of the series of Cuban revolutions. His background was wealthy, hard working and unconnected. His father, Ángel Castro y Argiz, had emigrated to Cuba from Spain in 1906, having fought as a conscript in the Spanish Army in its last, unsuccessful attempt to retain colonial control of the island. Ángel made up with work what he lacked in

A natural-born rebel, Castro was heavily involved in politics from an early age

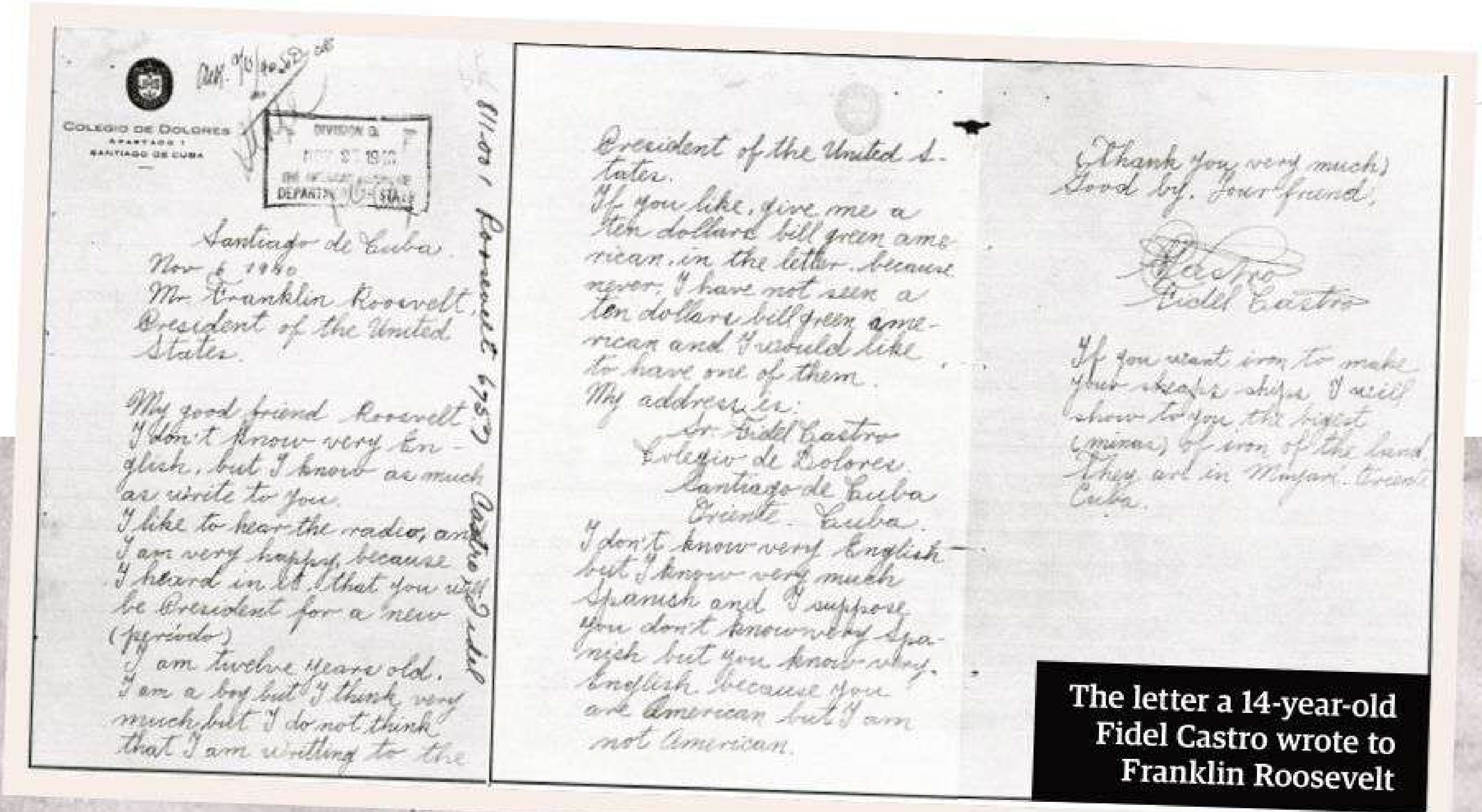
> "While Castro mixed with the poor, he was set apart from them as the son of the man who employed most of the local families"


The young Castro was an enthusiastic sportsman, playing baseball and basketball

contacts. His son later said that he had arrived in Cuba "and without a cent he started to work".

Starting as a labourer on the railway, Ángel moved on to working as a pedlar, selling lemonade and whatever else he could trade to local families, before moving to Oriente, Cuba's eastern province, settling in the Mayarí region. Through hard graft and harder saving, he put aside enough money to lease some land on which he planted sugar cane, selling the crop to the sugar mills. Reinvesting the money he earned, Ángel bought up and leased more land, working it and his labourers as hard as he worked himself. By the end of World War I, he was a wealthy man – something his wife wanted to enjoy. In 1911, Ángel had married María Argota y Reyes. María's tastes ran to ostentatious display and the fine life on offer in Santiago, anathema to the austere Ángel. By 1918, María and her husband had had five children, but the marriage foundered on their different attitudes towards the family's wealth and they parted ways.

Although Ángel was not a man typical of Cuba's landholding families, following his separation from María he did partake in the usual practices of a wealthy single man by taking a mistress. Lina Ruz González started as the family maid before being welcomed into Ángel's bed. They had three children together, a girl and two boys, before he decided to regularise their relationship, marrying on 26 April 1927. The couple would go on to have four more children together, including Fidel's younger brother and right-hand man, Raúl Modesto, who was born on 3 June 1931.



Colegio de Dolores
Apartado 1
Santiago de Cuba

DIVISION [illegible]
NOV 27 1940
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

811.001 Roosevelt 6757 Castro Fidel

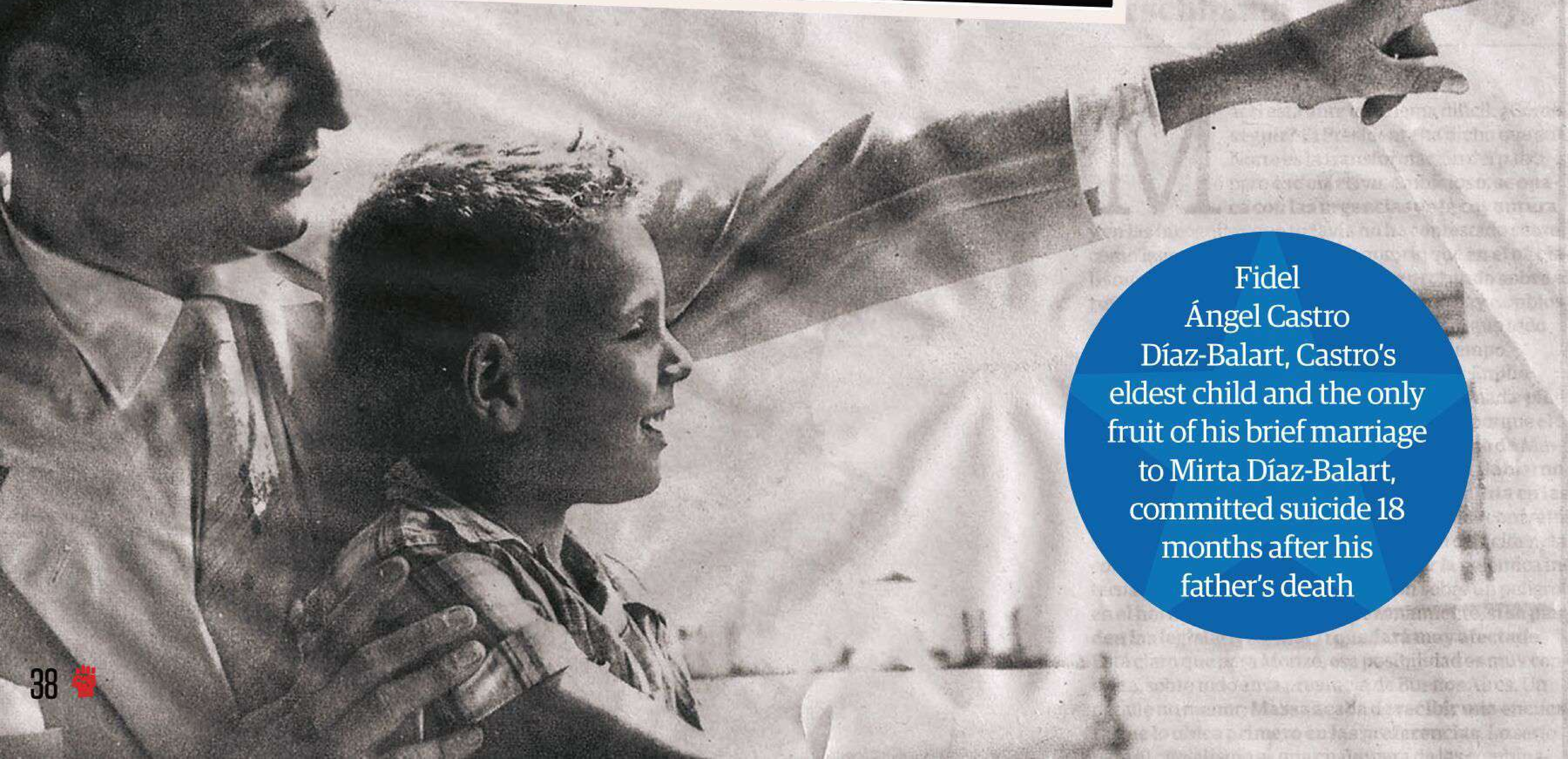
Santiago de Cuba
Nov 6 1940
Mr Franklin Roosvelt,
President of the United States.

My good friend Roosvelt I don't know very English, but I know as much as write to you.
I like to hear the radio, and I am very happy, because I heard in it, that you will be President for a new (periodo)
I am twelve years old.
I am a boy but I think very much but I do not think that I am writting to the President of the United States.
If you like, give me a ten dollars bill green american, in the letter, because never, I have not seen a ten dollars bill green american and I would like to have one of them.
My address is:
Sr. Fidel Castro
Colegio de Dolores
Santiago de Cuba
Oriente. Cuba.
I don't know very English but I know very much Spanish and I suppose you don't know very Spanish but you know very English because you are American but I am not American.
(Thank you very much)
Good by. Your friend,

Castro
Fidel Castro

If you want iron to make your sheaps ships I will show to you the bigest (minas) of iron of the land. They are in Mayarí. Oriente Cuba.

The letter a 14-year-old Fidel Castro wrote to Franklin Roosevelt


Castro with his first son, Fidel Ángel 'Fidelito', in the 1950s

Fidel Ángel Castro Díaz-Balart, Castro's eldest child and the only fruit of his brief marriage to Mirta Díaz-Balart, committed suicide 18 months after his father's death

# KILLING CASTRO

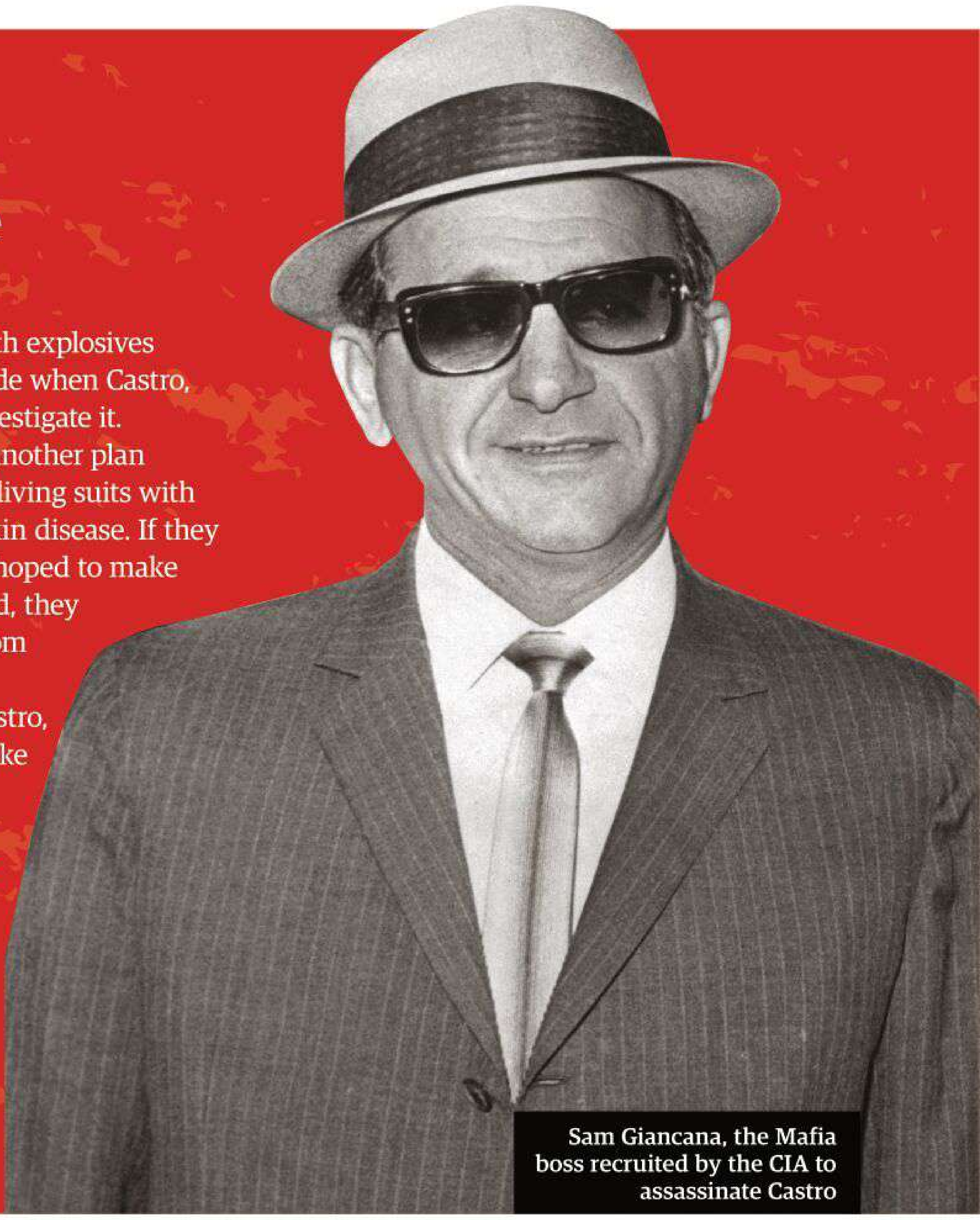
## The CIA's plots to kill Castro ran from the bizarre to the coldly serious

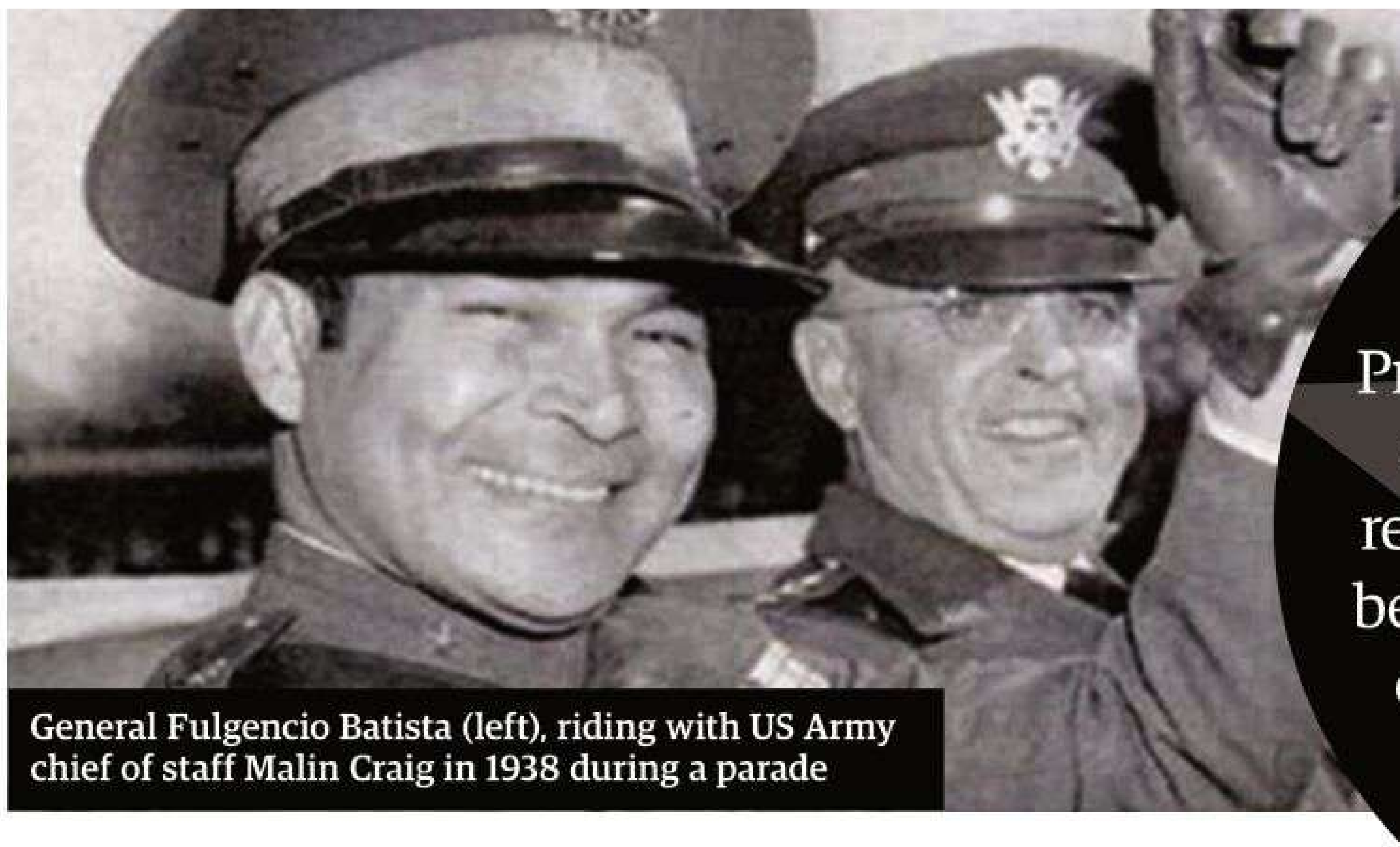
With a communist government just offshore, a series of American administrations sanctioned CIA attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro. Perhaps the most cold-blooded was the enlisting of Mafia bosses Sam Giancana, Johnny Roselli and Santo Trafficante to kill the Cuban leader.

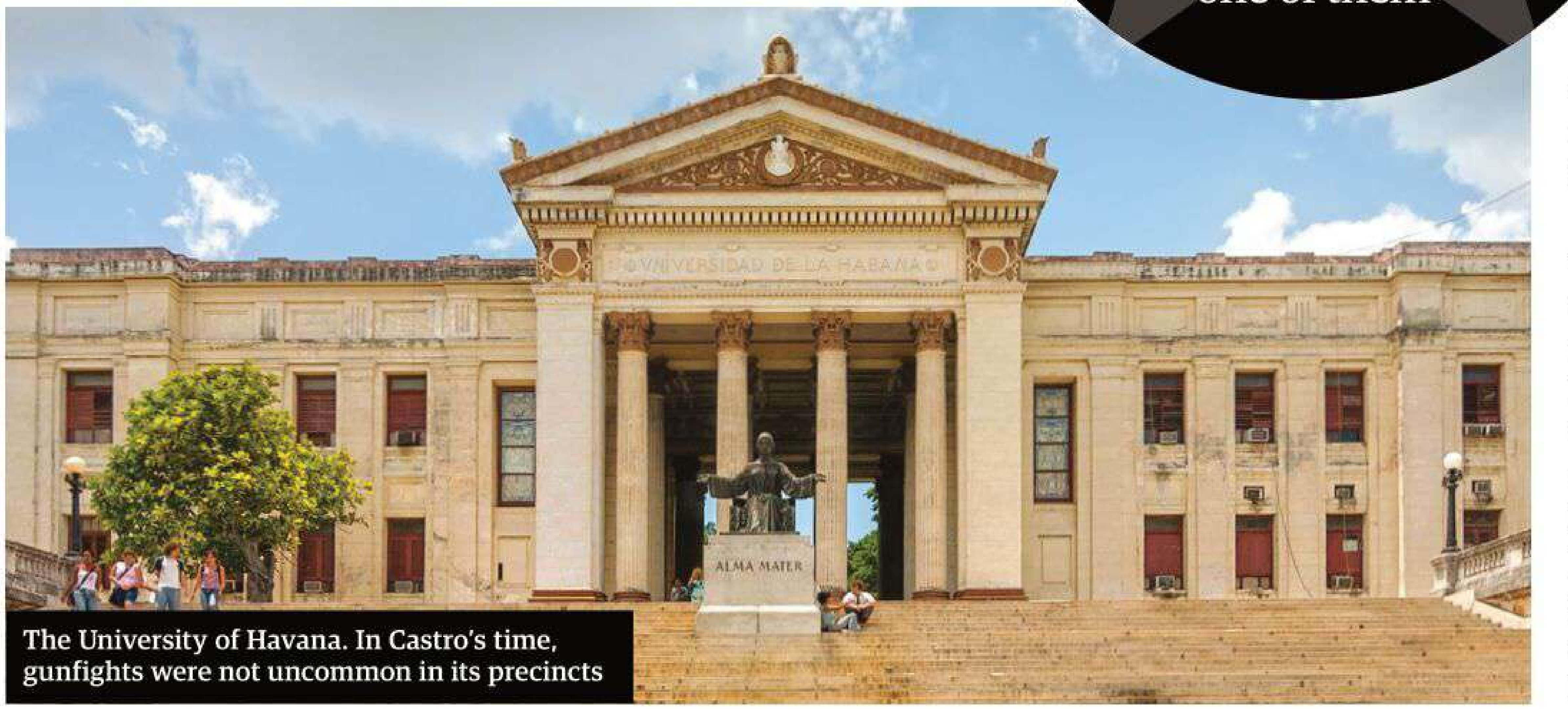
At the time, the Mafia bosses were all on the FBI's ten-most-wanted list of criminals, so the CIA had to contact them clandestinely, using a go-between. Through its agent, the CIA offered the men $150,000 for Castro's removal. The two parties agreed to use poisoned pills to kill him, which the CIA's technical services division made, while Giancana recruited a Cuban official to administer the poison. However, the official was not able to get the poison into Castro's food, and nor were two other men recruited by the Mafia, so the Mafia/CIA plot to kill Castro came to nothing.

But in comparison to other plots, this was positively sensible. Displaying unsuspected, although undisciplined, imagination, the CIA also considered killing Castro by spiking his cigars with botulinum toxin, blowing him up underwater by filling a brightly painted seashell with explosives and rigging it so that it would explode when Castro, who loved scuba diving, went to investigate it. Continuing the underwater theme, another plan was to contaminate one of Castro's diving suits with fungus, thus infecting him with a skin disease. If they couldn't kill Castro, the CIA at least hoped to make him an object of ridicule. To that end, they planned to spray the radio studio from which he broadcast to Cuba with a hallucinogen so that the tripping Castro, high on an LSD-like drug, would make a fool of himself live on air.

Last and, although there is considerable competition, least, was the plan to make Castro's beard fall out by soaking his shoes with thallium sulphate. According to Fabián Escalante, a Cuban counter-intelligence chief, there were 638 plots and schemes to kill Castro. In the end, Fidel Castro died on 25 November 2016. He was 90.


Sam Giancana, the Mafia boss recruited by the CIA to assassinate Castro


General Fulgencio Batista (left), riding with US Army chief of staff Malin Craig in 1938 during a parade



The University of Havana. In Castro's time, gunfights were not uncommon in its precincts

> When he was 14, Castro wrote to President Franklin Roosevelt, congratulating him on his re-election and asking for $10 because "I have not seen a ten dollars bill green american and I would like to have one of them"

By the time of her marriage, Lina had already given birth to her third child, Fidel Alejandro, on 13 August 1926. Growing up in such an irregular milieu, the young Fidel had contact with a much wider range of people than would be usual for the son of a wealthy landowner. However, his father, a man who defined himself by what he had earned through his own sweat, had little time for urban sophisticated culture, and his son knew little of the social circles of the men who would later form the greater part of his political companions. While Castro mixed with the poor, he was set apart from them as the son of the man who employed most of the local families. Growing up, Castro was always a little different, which may have contributed to his own sense of being unique and destined for some exceptional task.

Trying to instil some discipline into a rambunctious young boy, Ángel dispatched Fidel, only six, with his elder sister to Santiago, the capital of Oriente Province, where they boarded with a teacher who first taught them privately and then sent them to a nearby school. However, Castro chafed against the austerity of the regime at the house where he was boarding, now with his elder brother as well as his sister, and he inveigled his siblings to join him in rebelling against the rules with the aim of forcing his parents into allowing him to become a boarder at his school. Castro's first act of rebellion succeeded: his parents moved their truculent son from his boarding house into the school. Castro, from a young age, was a rebel looking for the revolution that would frame his natural inclinations.

The greatest influence on the young Castro, both personally and intellectually, were the Jesuit-run schools that educated him through his teens. These foundations, first in Santiago and then in Havana, were strict and rigorous, but they inculcated in Castro great self-discipline, perseverance and determination. Although a good student, Castro put most of his energy into sport, pitching baseball for his school team as well as playing basketball and running.

It was his move to Havana University in 1945 that began Castro's interest in politics. He soon began to make a name for himself, campaigning (unsuccessfully) for the presidency of the student federation and, in November 1946, delivering a ringing denunciation of the corruption and incompetence of the government that made the front pages of the national newspapers. In 1947, Castro joined the Partido Ortodoxo, which was campaigning against the rampant corruption of the government. He also joined an abortive attempt to bring down the president of the Dominican Republic (the Cuban government got wind of the plot and arrested the ringleaders before they could set sail for the Dominican Republic). Castro did, however, manage to travel to Colombia, where he played an active part in the riots that broke out in Bogotá in April 1948. None of these actions were in any way communist-inspired, but were rather the results of the impatience of a natural rebel, chafing against the constraints of the political system of his time. Wherever and whenever Castro had been born, he would have rebelled: it was his nature.

By now, Fidel Castro was an active member of the swirling, confused mess of rival and allied parties all jockeying to bring down the government of, first, Ramón Grau and then, from 1948, Carlos Prío Socarrás. In spite of his intense political activities, Castro found time to court and wed Mirta Díaz-Balart on 11 October 1948. Mirta was the daughter of a wealthy Cuban family and the marriage was entered into despite the opposition of her family. The couple had one son, Fidelito, but divorced in 1955.

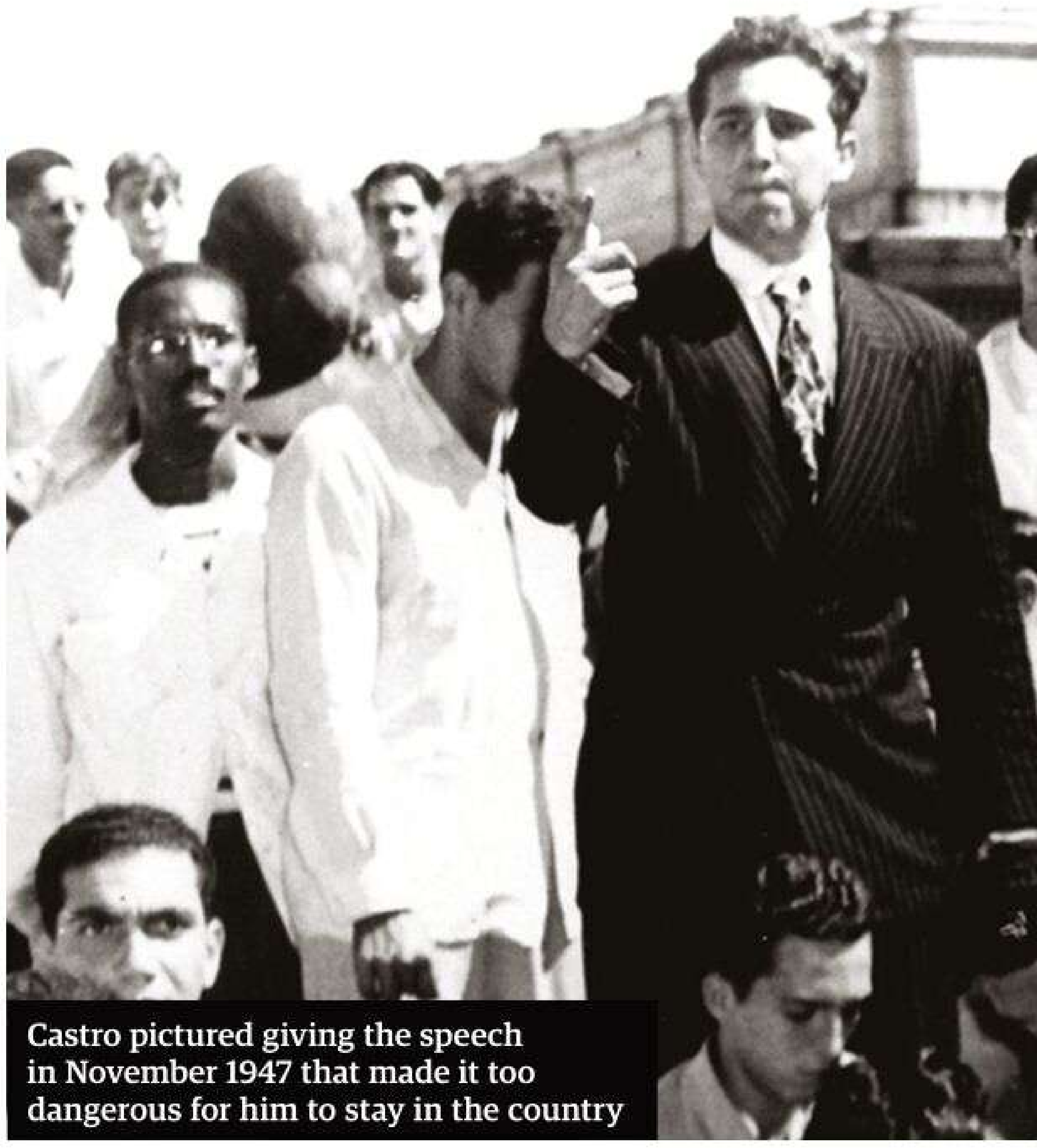
In 1949, Castro made a public speech in which he outlined the secret deal that the government of Carlos Prío Socarrás had made with the gangs plaguing Cuba in which the government promised gang leaders official ministerial positions in exchange for the gang leaders reining in their men. The speech further raised Castro's profile, but also required him to make a hasty exit – to the United States, of all places, where he laid low until the furore had died down.

Returning to Cuba, Castro finished his studies in 1950, qualifying as a lawyer, and setting up in practice in one of the slums of Havana. His profile grew steadily higher through his frequent appearances on local radio stations and contributions to Havana newspapers.

Castro was nominated as a Congressional candidate in the elections scheduled for 1952 and he threw himself into the campaign, giving multiple speeches each day through the campaign as well as sending out thousands of leaflets. His

> Castro's sister, Juanita, and one of his daughters, Alina Fernández Revuelta, separately escaped Cuba for exile in America, from where they criticised the regime

Eduardo Chibás, founder of the Partido Ortodoxo, shot himself during a live radio broadcast – only he got the timing wrong and fired the shot during an advert break



Castro pictured giving the speech in November 1947 that made it too dangerous for him to stay in the country

## THE LIFE OF FIDEL CASTRO

1926

**Castro's birth**
Fidel Castro was the third child that his mother had with Ángel Castro y Argiz while still his mistress. They married a year after Fidel's birth, making his younger brother and right-hand man Raúl legitimate from birth.
**13 August 1926**

1953

**Attack on Moncada Barracks**
Hoping to spark a general insurrection, Castro leads 165 men in an attack on the main barracks outside Santiago de Cuba. The attack fails in brutal farce and Castro is captured six days later.
**26 July 1953**

1955

**Castro released and in exile**
In May, Castro is released from prison and goes into exile in Mexico. There, with his brother Raúl and 18 companions, he founds the 26th of July Movement, dedicated to the overthrow of the Batista government and meets Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, an Argentinian revolutionary.
**May-June 1955**

1956

**Revolutionaries return**
Castro sails back to Cuba with 81 other men. This fresh attempt to foment revolution is as risible as his first; only 12 survive, including Fidel and Raúl Castro, and Che Guevara, saving themselves by fleeing into the mountains.
**2 December 1956**

1959

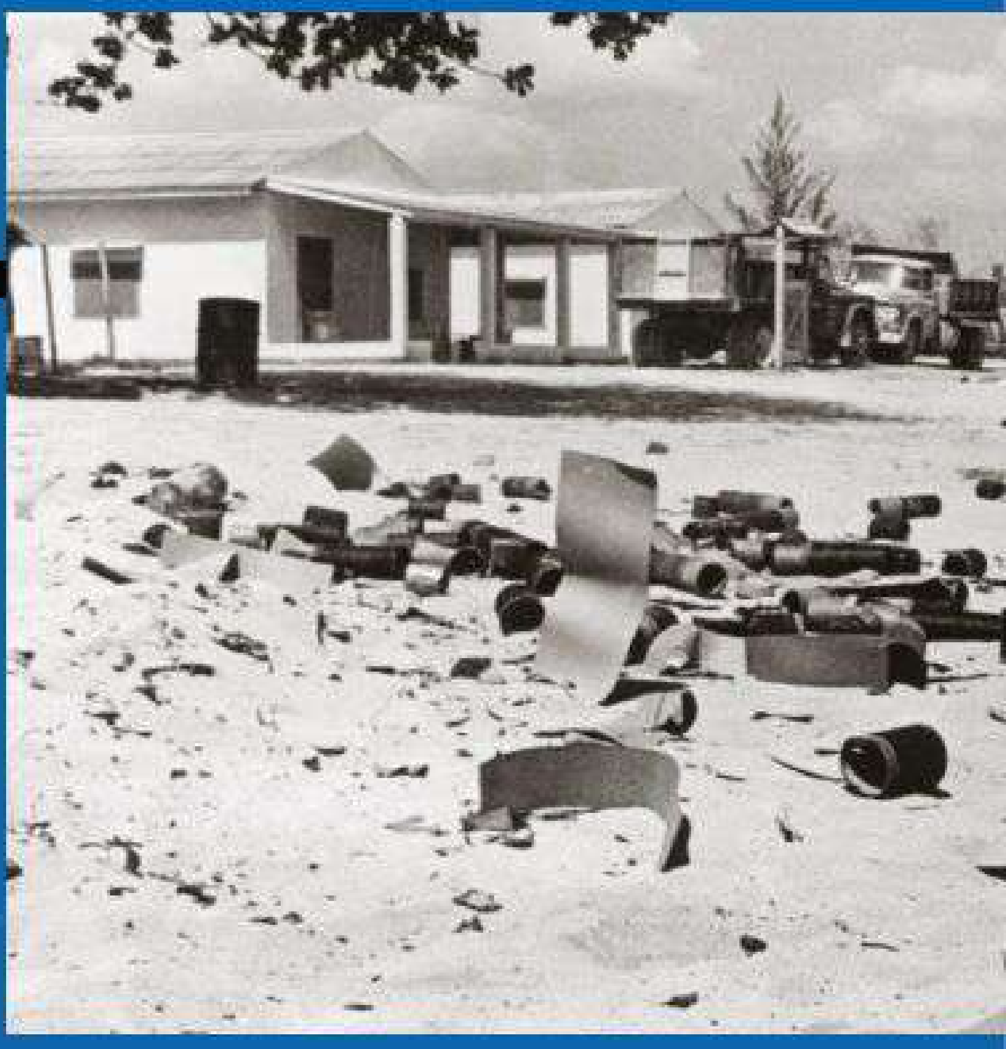
**Batista flees**
Having somehow contrived to lose a guerrilla war against a bunch of revolutionaries as incompetent as Castro's men, Fulgencio Batista flees Cuba, taking $300 million with him.
**1 January 1959**

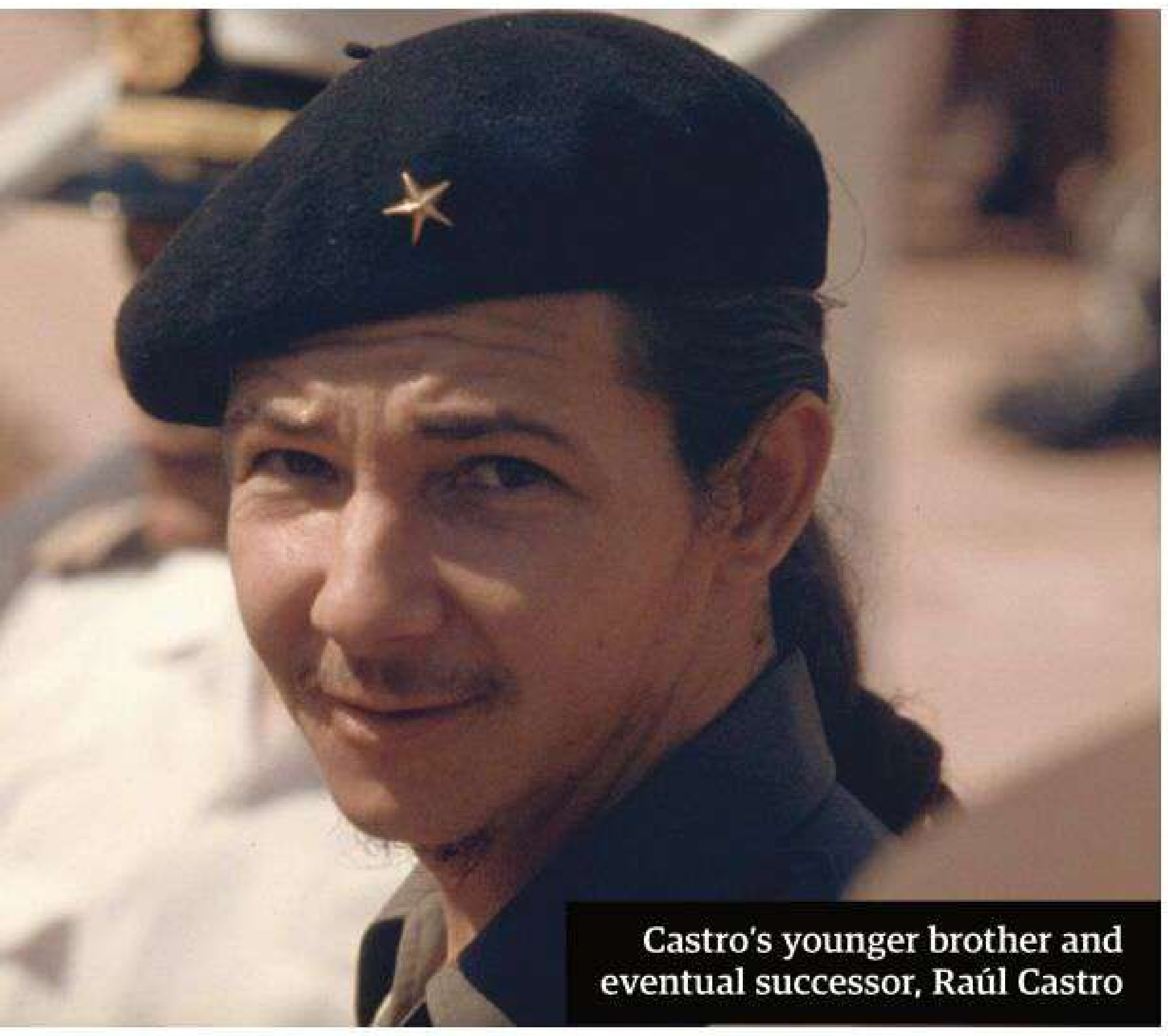
**El Comandante**
Castro, at the head of his triumphant revolutionary forces, arrives in Havana and declares himself commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces.
**8 January 1959**

**Prime Minister Castro**
With all the guns behind him, Castro ousts the prime minister and takes over the government: "Revolution first, elections later." How much later is never made clear.
**16 February 1959**

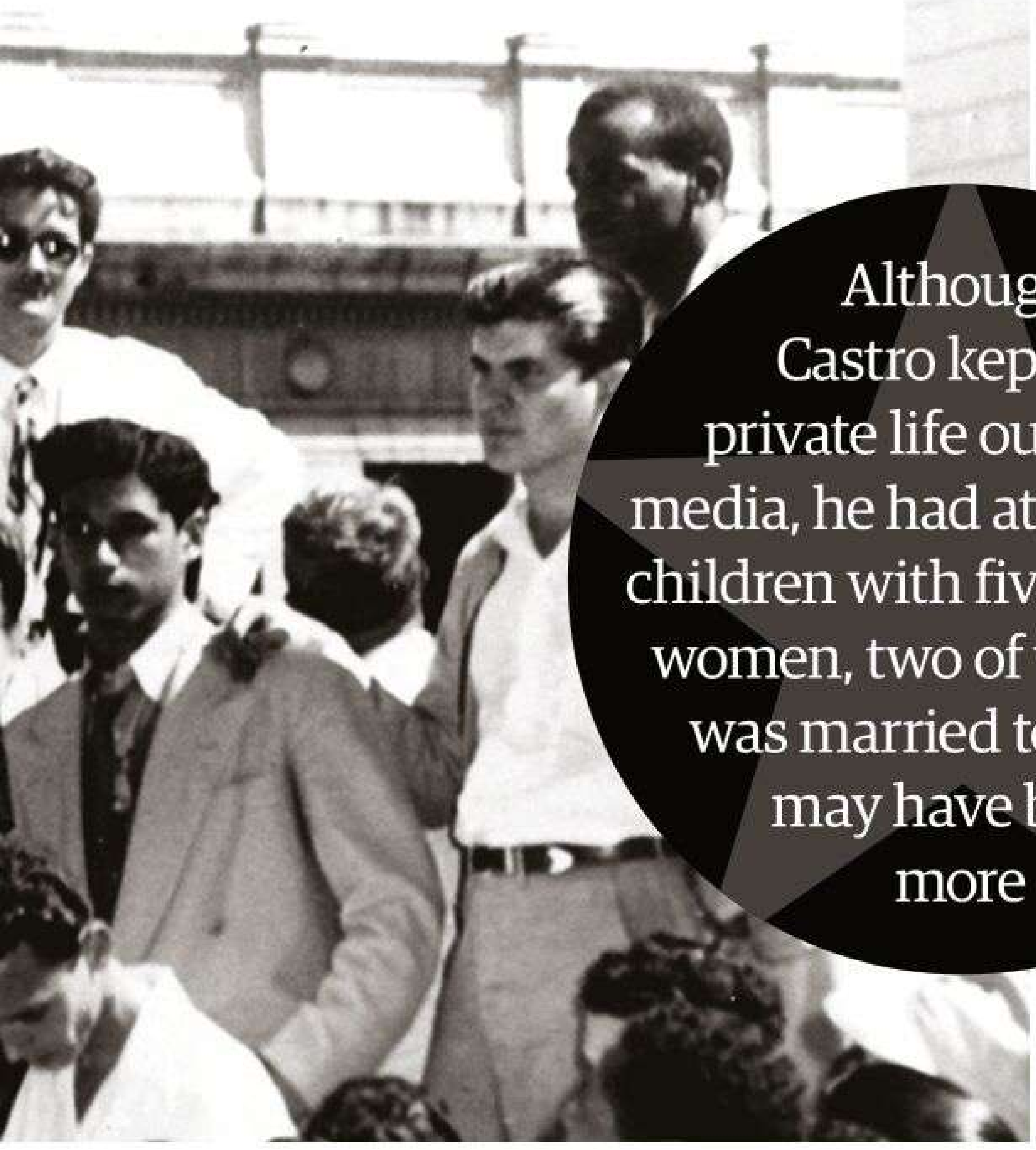
1961

**Bay of Pigs Invasion**
The CIA-sponsored invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles goes as disastrously wrong as Castro's own invasion five years earlier.
**17 – 19 April 1961**





Castro's younger brother and eventual successor, Raúl Castro



party, the Ortodoxo, was on track to win, but the election never happened.

On 10 March 1952, General Fulgencio Batista led a military coup that stopped the planned elections and installed himself as president – the man who had led the 1933 Revolution himself brought it to an end. Batista had been one of three candidates for the presidency but, running far behind his rivals, he decided to circumvent the ballot box and, through his control of the army, impose himself as Cuba's leader. He sold his coup as a means to end the endemic corruption of the previous governments. Indeed, so fed up were many elements in Cuban society of the corruption that they had had to endure that they welcomed Batista taking control of the government, even when he started to ban political parties and suspended the constitutional right to strike.

Castro, a lawyer, led several legal challenges against Batista's government, arguing that the general had breached the constitution and government ministers had broken laws. The cases were thrown out by the Cuban courts. With that avenue closed, Castro definitively turned his back on peaceful action to bring about change. As far as he was concerned, the only way to bring down the government was by violent revolution. In this, he was merely articulating the lessons that previous Cubans had learned in their long and bloody history.

> Although Castro kept his private life out of the media, he had at least nine children with five different women, two of whom he was married to. There may have been more

Within the banned opposition parties, the established leadership struggled to articulate a response to Batista's coup. Indeed, it took the exiled politicians a year to issue a call for the return of democratic elections. Meanwhile, among the political activists who remained in Cuba, a gulf was opening between those who favoured nonviolent action and those who wanted to start shedding some blood. Castro – young, fiery and self-confident – was most definitely a member of the latter.

Castro started organising a clandestine network and an underground press – Batista had instituted stringent press controls – and recruiting members to his movement, which was exactly what he called it: El Movimiento ('The Movement'). The paper Castro and his movement published was called *El Acusador* ('The Accuser'), and that is what it did, accusing the Batista government of a string of abuses and corruptions.

Although Castro would later rewrite his personal history along Marxist lines, claiming that all his subsequent actions leading up to the doomed but pivotal assault on the Moncada Barracks on 26 July 1953 were part of his worked-out revolutionary narrative, this isn't necessarily true. In fact, his actions suggest, much more strongly, a man living out the romantic narrative of Cuba's previous revolutionaries – a narrative based on nationalism and moral regeneration through violent sacrifice rather than dialectical materialism.

Castro organised the Movement in ten-man cells, with both political and military wings. The political one published *El Acusador*, while the military side gathered weapons and ammunition and set about training recruits. By July 1953, the Movement had about 1,200 members, most of them recruited from the youth wing of the Ortodoxo party, making up 150 cells and based in the west of Havana and Pinar del Río.

From these 1,200 men, Castro selected 165 to take part in his next move: an attack on the main barracks outside the city of Santiago de Cuba in the province of Oriente. As with previous Cuban revolutionaries, he hoped to kick-start the revolution with a heroic demonstration of revolutionary determination. Little did he know that it would all go horribly, comically wrong.

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**Cuban Missile Crisis**
Now a Soviet satellite, Cuba accepts Soviet nuclear missiles. With the world on the brink of nuclear Armageddon, Soviet Premier Khrushchev withdraws the missiles from Cuba
**16 – 28 October 1962**

1962

1991

**Collapse of the Soviet Union**
The unlooked-for and almost miraculous collapse of the Soviet Union and the dismantling of the Warsaw Pact ends Soviet support for Cuba, plunging the country into economic crisis.
**1991**

2008

**Castro steps down**
After nearly 50 years in charge of Cuba, Castro steps down as president. His brother takes his place.
**19 February 2008**

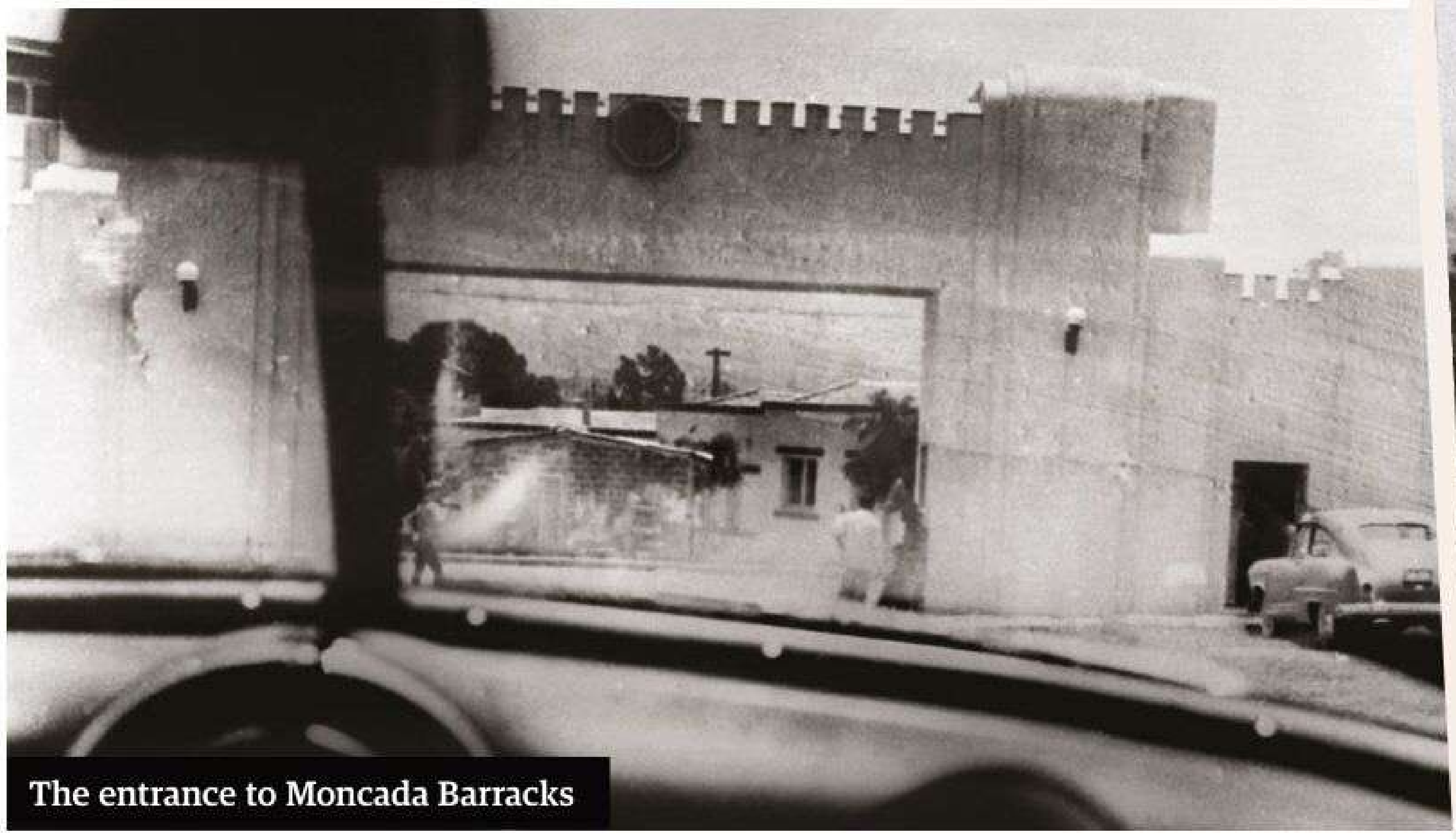
2016

**The end**
Castro dies from natural causes and his body is cremated.
**5 November 2016**

A crowd gathers to congratulate Fidel Castro during his victorious march to Havana, the capital of Cuba. President Fulgencio Batista left the country on 1 January 1959, fleeing to the Dominican Republic. Che Guevara would enter the capital the next day, while Castro arrived seven days after Batista had fled.

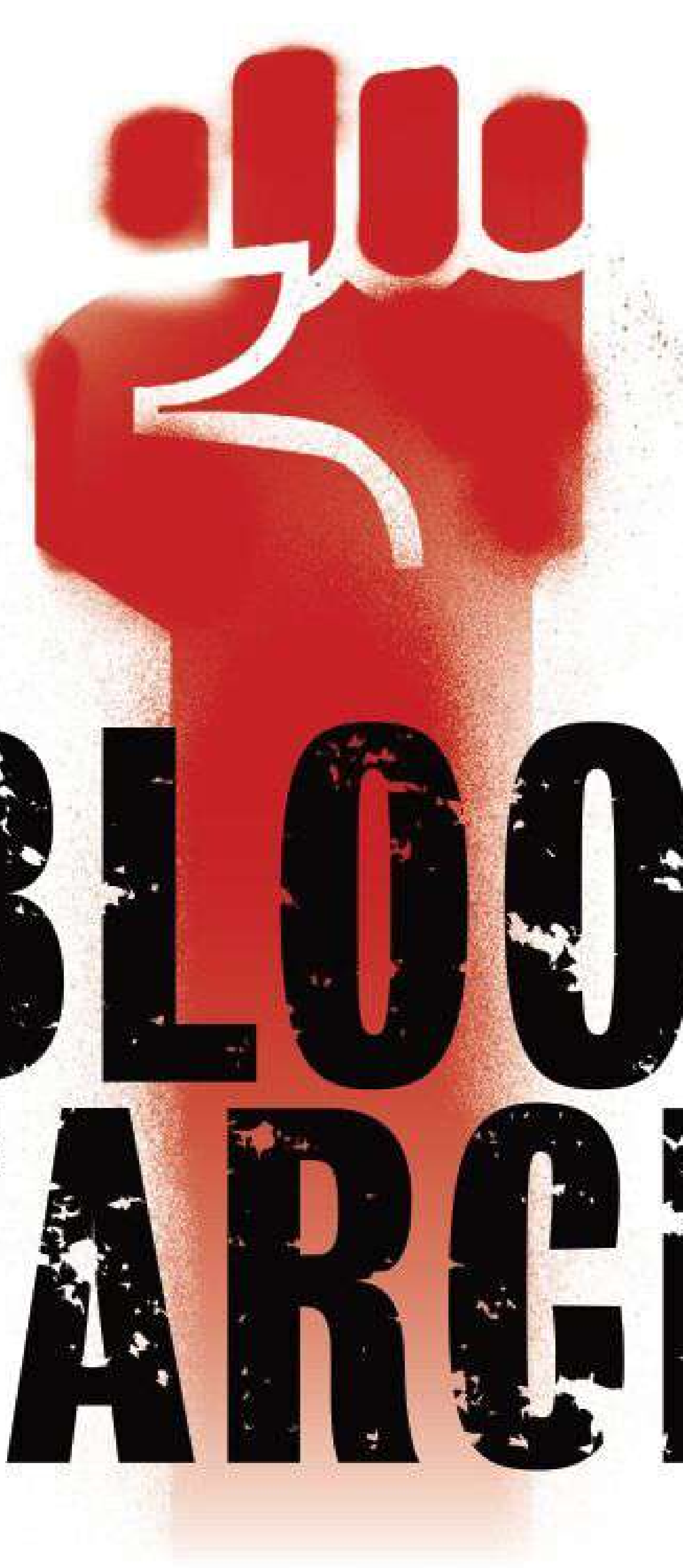
Fidel Castro being interrogated after his capture following the attack on Moncada Barracks

"Castro hoped to have the time to distribute the arms looted from the barracks"



The entrance to Moncada Barracks

Fidel Castro (standing, centre) with some of the other leaders of the Movement. Abel Santamaría is on Castro's right



# A BLOODY FARCE

Aiming to kick-start a revolution, Castro led a doomed attack on an army barracks – but survived to fight on

Written by
**EDOARDO ALBERT**

In Fidel Castro's reworking of his personal history as national mythology, the assault on the Moncada Barracks on 26 July 1953 became the first act of the Revolution. In reality, it was a quixotic expedition launched by a man manifestly unconcerned for the lives of his followers (or himself) so long as by their deaths they could make a suitably grand gesture against the country's oppressors. If it was not for Castro's subsequent, unlikely success, the attack on the barracks would rate no greater notice today than as an entry in the Darwin Awards: the removal from the gene pool of the politically suicidal.

But perhaps the greatest of Castro's abilities was his extraordinary capacity to survive: both the plots of assassins and his own political mistakes, mistakes that would have destroyed any man with less innate confidence. The mistakes Castro made in putting together the plan for his assault on the barracks were so extensive that it's easier to look first at what he got right than at what he got wrong. In that, the most significant is the idea for the attack in the first place. To the outsider, the plan – launch an attack on an army barracks, far from the capital in the province of Oriente, make a proclamation and expect the people to rise up in spontaneous revolutionary fervour – appears completely ludicrous. But, to someone as versed in Cuban history and its struggle against its colonial masters as Castro, it was not quite as stupid as it might appear.

The province of Oriente, through most of its history, had been largely cut off from the rest of Cuba by mountains and, in the days of sail, unfavourable ocean currents. As a result, its inhabitants were markedly different from the rest of the island, consisting largely of escaped slaves and fugitives: it was the land of hard sanctuary and harsher reprisals. In the latter part of Spanish rule, Oriente had been the most rebellious of Cuban provinces, as well as being the arena of slave revolts and sugar workers' strikes. During the 1930s, Oriente had been home to guerrilla groups led by Antonio Guiteras, while by the 1950s the province suffered the highest unemployment in Cuba, as well as having lower living standards than the west of the island. So Castro had some reason to hope that the people of Oriente might heed his call to revolt.

There were also strategic military reasons for the decision: there was only one road connecting Oriente to the west of the island. Cut that, and the province would be isolated from Batista's army. With the road cut, Castro hoped to have the time to distribute the arms looted from the barracks to a newly militant population and raise a revolt against Batista's unloved soldiers.

That was the strategy. While rooted in Cuban history and the romanticism of its failed revolutions, it suffered a major practical flaw: the Movement that Castro had organised in the last two years had basically no presence in the province. There was no cell in Santiago, the capital of Oriente, where the barracks was located, and only one cell in the whole province. There was only one local among the men taking part in the attack. So Castro was leading a bunch of strangers in an assault on the army barracks in a province where his men had no local knowledge or contacts.

When President Batista visited the prison where the rebels were being held, Castro and his comrades belted out revolutionary songs to serenade him

The tactical plan at least provided simple mission objectives. Castro would lead the major attack on the Moncada Barracks, seizing the buildings from the army and giving out weapons to any local people ready to join

# CASTRO'S SECOND-IN-COMMAND

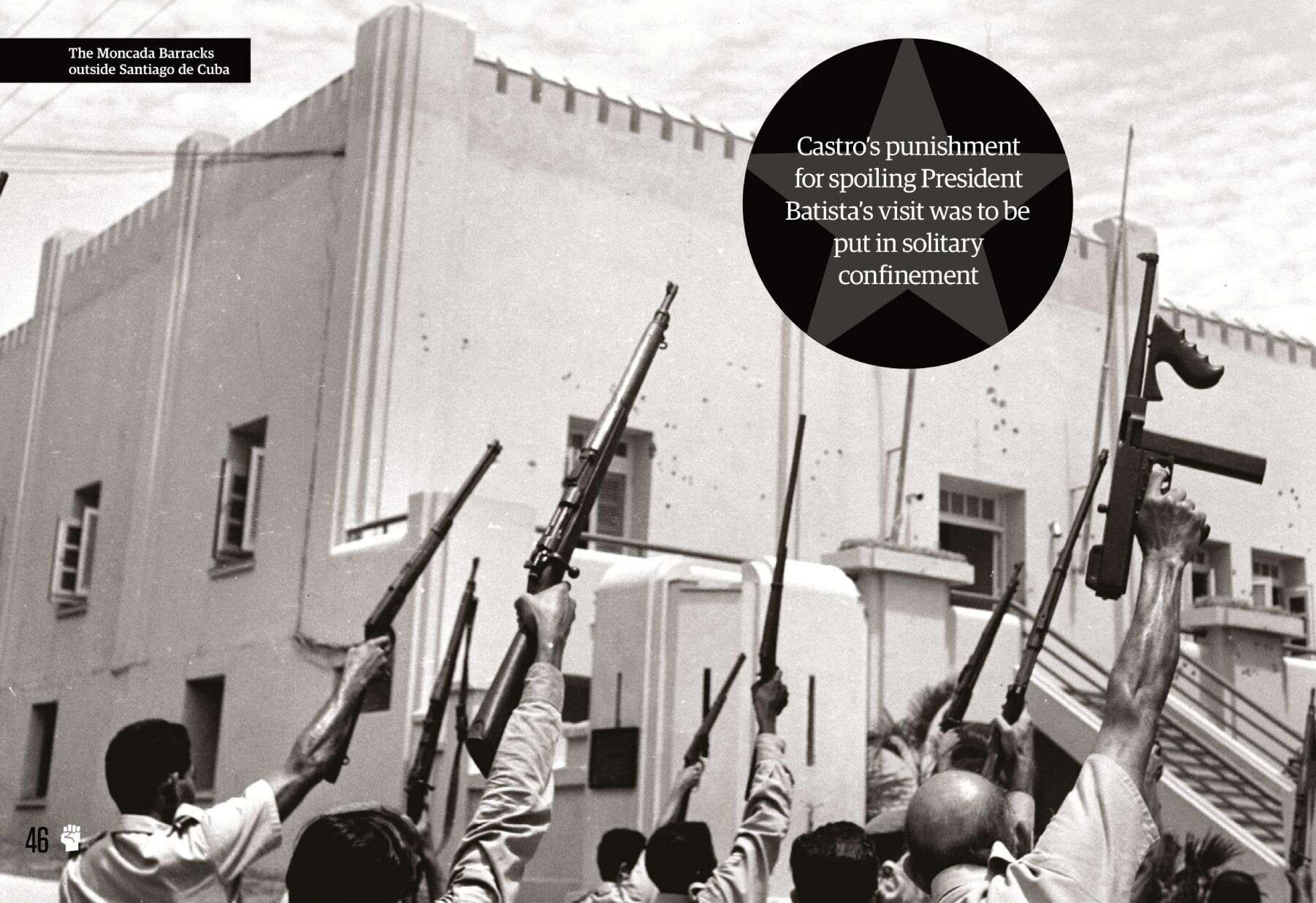
## Abel Santamaría was seen by the members of the fledgling Movement as its soul

Abel Santamaría (20 October 1927 – 26 July 1953), Castro's second-in-command during the attack on Moncada Barracks

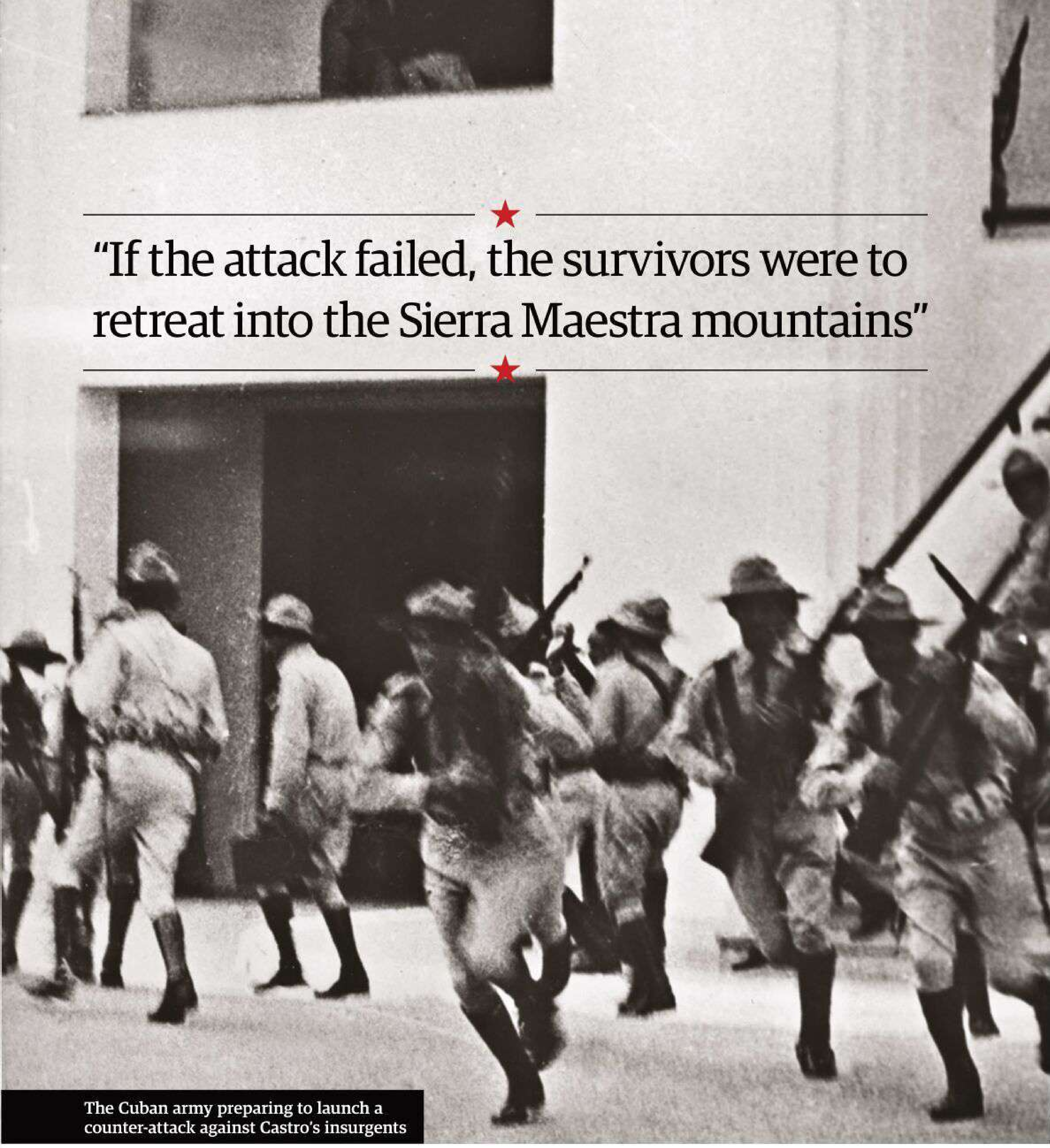
Abel Santamaría and his sister, Haydée, were the children of a petit bourgeois Cuban family: their father was the director of a sugar mill. Haydée was the elder of the siblings but, according to her own account, she looked up to her brother, seeing him as her mentor and guide. The brother and sister at a young age decided that they would struggle to improve the lot of the workers at the sugar mill – to their parents' incomprehension. Eventually, Abel moved to Havana to begin studying at the university, and he took his sister with him. There, they met Castro and fell under the spell of the young, loquacious lawyer, letting him use their small flat for political meetings. For the attack on Moncada Barracks, Castro put Abel in charge of one group tasked with covering the main rebel group; Haydée was also assigned to that group. Seeing the attack dissolve into chaos, Abel, Haydée and the rest remained in position, giving Castro and the others the time to flee. But, their ammunition exhausted, they were captured. Along with Abel and Haydée Santamaría was Haydée's fiancé, Boris Santa Coloma. The soldiers tortured Abel and Boris to get them to say where Castro and the others would be hiding, but despite the most extreme torture, neither man cracked. Then, thinking to break Haydée, the soldiers brought her Abel's eye, which they had gouged out. Haydée had lost both her brother and her fiancé, but she refused to divulge any information about where Castro could be found.

Haydée Santamaría served a short term in prison, then helped smuggle out the text of Castro's speech before the court. She remained a prominent figure in the Cuban government until her death by suicide on 28 July 1980.

Castro's punishment for spoiling President Batista's visit was to be put in solitary confinement

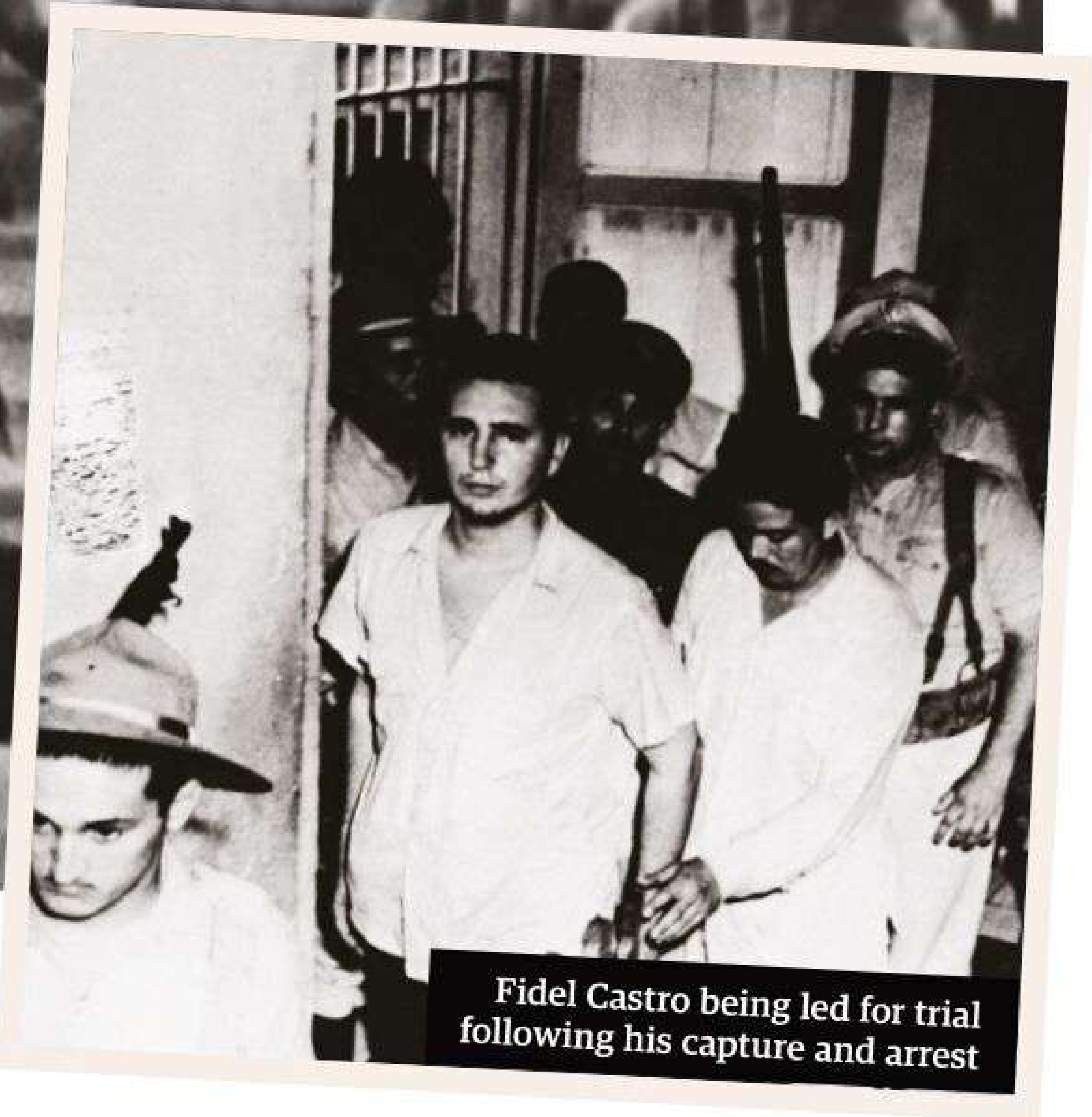


The Moncada Barracks outside Santiago de Cuba



“If the attack failed, the survivors were to retreat into the Sierra Maestra mountains”

The Cuban army preparing to launch a counter-attack against Castro’s insurgents



Fidel Castro being led for trial following his capture and arrest

the revolt. Meanwhile, a second, smaller group would attack Bayamo barracks, which were 100 kilometres (62 miles) further west, thus sealing off the road by which reinforcements would come to Moncada Barracks, giving Castro and his men more time to raise the revolution. There was, at least, a fall-back plan: if the attack failed, the survivors were to retreat into the Sierra Maestra mountains, there to launch a guerrilla war.

Perhaps nothing illustrates more clearly both how poorly thought out the whole enterprise was, and the confused jumble of romantic historical notions that had convinced Castro to go through with it, than the proclamation Castro intended to make once he had seized control of Moncada Barracks. It had been written by a Cuban poet with Castro’s input, and placed the call to arms within the context of Cuba’s struggles for independence, made a stirring call to moral renewal while promising justice and money for the poor without actually addressing how this heaven on earth might actually be brought about. It was all aspiration, written in the flowing language of Cuban dreams. Having read out this manifesto, Castro was going to call for a national revolution, play a recording of Eduardo Chibás’s farewell speech and close with stirring music (Beethoven’s *Symphony No.3*, the *Eroica*, and Chopin’s *Polonaise in A-flat Major*).

It was all quite mad – a madness made clearer by Castro’s intention to include Chibás’s farewell speech. Eduardo Chibás had founded the Partido Ortodoxo, which Castro had joined, and Castro considered him a mentor, almost a father figure. Chibás had campaigned hard against government corruption, using his radio broadcast as a platform to bring ministers to account. But when he was unable, as promised, to provide evidence on air proving the corruption of the minster of education, Chibás was driven to desperate, not to say lunatic, extremes. Having announced that he would make the evidence available in his radio broadcast of 5 August 1951, Chibás began the programme by long, rambling denunciations of government corruption, rather than providing the promised evidence. The programme ran on, and on, and on, and still no evidence of government corruption was forthcoming. Then, Chibás produced a gun. Making a final, impassioned call for freedom and an end to corruption, Chibás shot himself live on air. Only, because he had dragged on so long, he had run over. Rather than shooting himself live on air, Chibás pulled the trigger during an ad break. It did not have quite the impact he had hoped for. Castro was in the studio for the whole of this bathetic performance and accompanied Chibás to hospital. He had shot himself in the stomach – so a rather half-hearted attempt at on-air suicide – and the doctors initially thought he would survive. But infection set in and Eduardo Chibás died 11 days later. That Castro thought playing Chibás’s final broadcast as part of his call to national uprising was appropriate shows the confused miasma of longing and hope that constituted nationalist aspirations.

The attack, when it came, was a complete fiasco. The rebels had travelled from Havana to Santiago de Cuba on 24 July, making the journey in two buses. 25 July was the feast of St James (Sant Iago), and an occasion for fiesta. Castro had hoped that the dawn of 26 July would see many of the troops

The Moncada Barracks were named after General Guillermón Moncada, a hero of the Cuban War of Independence

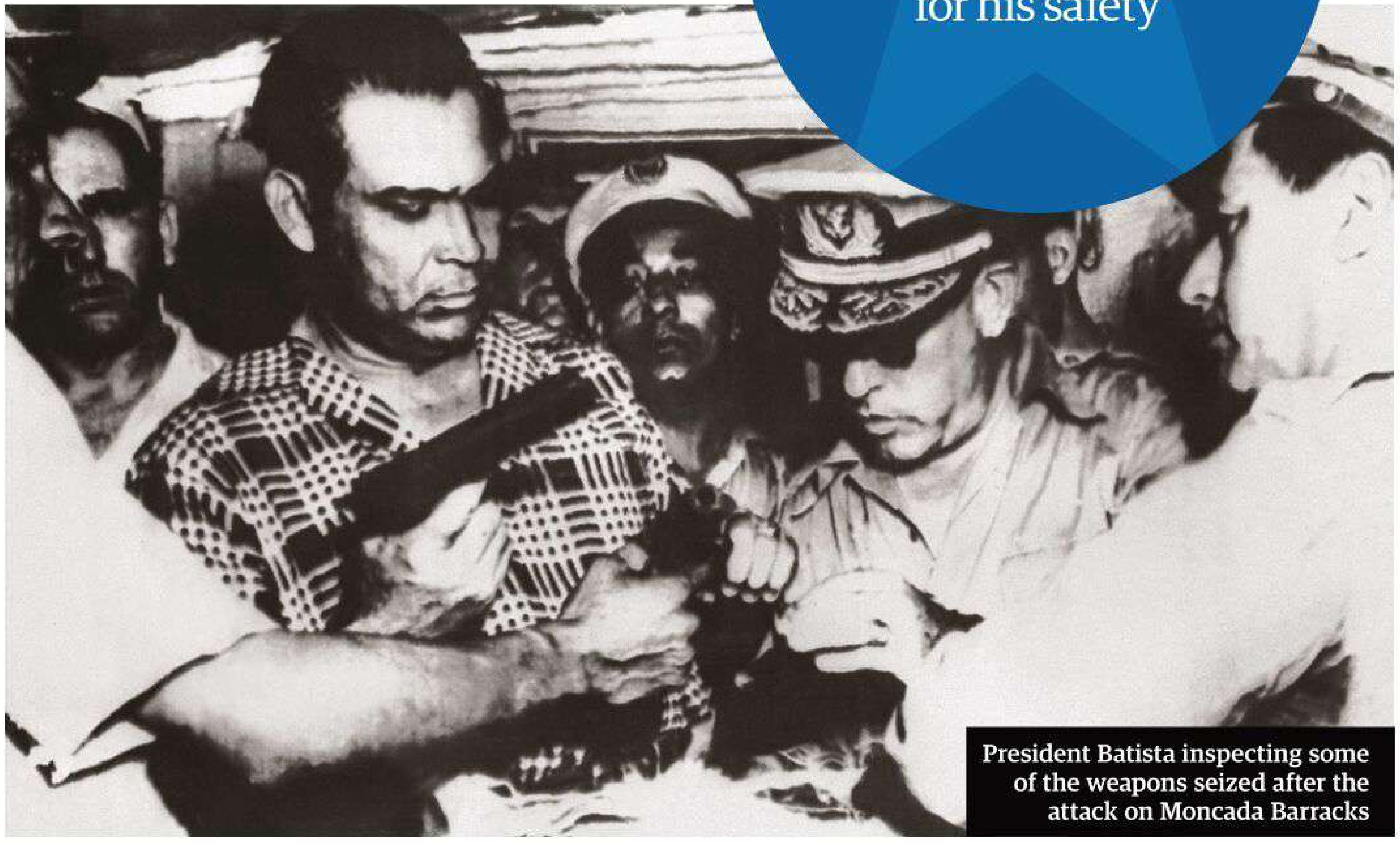
Fidel Castro (right) with some of the other men taken into custody following the attack on Moncada Barracks

Castro refused to surrender until he had received guarantees for his safety

still hungover or, better yet, still away, having not returned to barracks. The rebels put up at a farmhouse that Castro had rented and there he told them the plan. Given their weaponry – a ragbag assortment of shotguns, rifles and handguns, many of which weren't working properly – and the odds, it was pretty clearly suicidal, but there is no record of anyone objecting. Glorious, bloody failure was an intrinsic part of the Cuban nationalist mythos, and Castro and his men (and two women) were playing their part in the national story.

At 5am, the rebels drove from the farm in a convoy of 16 vehicles. Castro had about 135 men at his command. The secondary attack on the Bayamo barracks was assigned to 24 men. However, one car got a flat tyre and two more got lost in Santiago on the way. It's a difficult job to keep a column of 20 cars together and the rebels failed to do so. By the time Castro arrived at Moncada Barracks the rebels were already in considerable disarray. Things did not get better for them once they had arrived.

Castro had equipped his men with army uniforms, hoping to get into the barracks before the army realised it was under attack. But a patrol spotted the approaching convoy of rebel cars and opened fire before they had even reached the gates. Hearing the fire, the men at the back of the column thought they had already reached the barracks. Looking round, they saw some likely looking buildings nearby and attacked and took them. They had bravely seized a hospital. Meanwhile, two other groups of rebels, which Castro had ordered to provide covering fire from behind the barracks, joined the attack. Raúl Castro's group occupied a roof while Abel Santamaría, the co-leader of the attack, occupied another hospital building, although at least this was part of the barracks. Shut away in the hospital, Santamaría and his group did not realise that the attack had failed completely and remained, to their brutal ends.

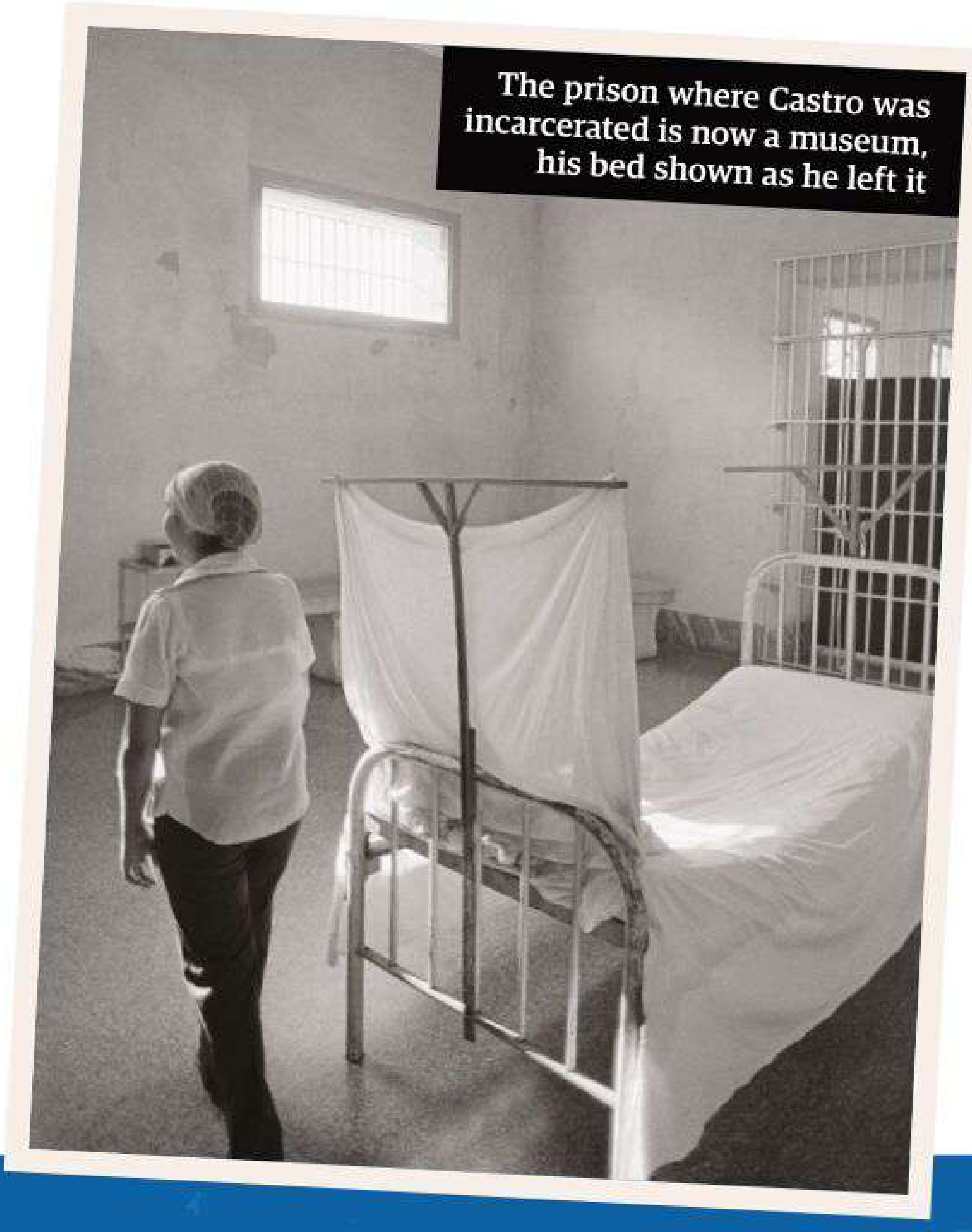


President Batista inspecting some of the weapons seized after the attack on Moncada Barracks

In the bloody, noisy chaos, Castro gave up on the attack and retreated, driving wildly for the mountains and hiding there. In the meantime, the other assault on the Bayamo barracks had gone as farcically wrong as the main attack: the rebels were spotted before they got anywhere near the barracks and were forced to flee.

Stung into ruthless action, the army set out to hunt down and kill the rebels. Fifteen soldiers and three policemen had been killed in the attack; the ones who had survived were not inclined to be merciful. Nine rebels had been killed during the attack, with another 11 rebels wounded although four of this number had been shot in cases of friendly fire. The 18 men holed up in the hospital abandoned their weapons and pretended to be patients, but were swiftly identified by the army and executed. Other rebels fled into the streets of Santiago, attempting to escape but, without any local network or knowledge, they were swiftly captured. In the next three days, 34 men were caught, tortured for information and killed. In the end, more than 60 rebels were killed.

Castro managed to hide out in the mountains for six days. This was long enough for news of the army's brutality to leak out. Romantic revolution being so ingrained in the Cuban psyche a general outcry was raised against any further summary executions. When Castro was finally cornered, the commanding officer of the detachment of soldiers who took him captive decided to take Castro to the jail in the city itself rather than to Moncada Barracks, where his life expectancy would have been short. Castro's luck held, in a way it had not for the rebels who had died. As news of the army's brutality spread, the Archbishop of Santiago intervened to save other captured rebels, driving into the mountains to prevent their summary execution. Castro and the other surviving rebels were put in jail outside Santiago to await trial.


**The prison where Castro was incarcerated is now a museum, his bed shown as he left it**

The province of Oriente was both Cuba's poorest province and its most Cuban province

The official Cuban account of the attack on Moncada Barracks seeks to place it foursquare into Marxist theory as an example of a proletarian uprising. But it is clear that it was not. Only one or two men had any links with unions, almost all of them were white (black and mixed-race Cubans tended to support Batista who was himself mixed race) and members of the Partido Ortodoxo. Everything about the attack sprang from the reworking of Cuba's history of glorious, failed revolutions into a tale of heroic failure and blood sacrifice: it was a populist Cuban uprising, not a communist revolution.

The trial of Fidel Castro and other surviving members of the group began on 21 September 1953 in the Santiago de Cuba Palace of Justice. It ran until 6 October. Some one hundred people had been arrested in the aftermath of the attack and were on trial, many of them having had nothing to do with the plot. Castro, a lawyer, took on his own defence – that also ensured he would get a chance to speak in court. Of the rest of the defendants, many were acquitted. Only 31 were found guilty and most of them received short sentences, although Castro's brother, Raúl, got 13 years.

Having inveigled a special hearing just for himself, and with the eyes of the nation riveted upon the courtroom, Castro wrote the speech that he intended to give – not in his defence, as he knew that the court would find him guilty, but as his testimony to the wider Cuban public. And what a lot of testimony he had to give: the speech was four hours long. During what must have seemed its interminable length, Castro situated what he had done within the context of the Cuban struggle for independence, called Batista a tyrant, sketched out the reforms he wanted for the Cuban people and finished, finally, with a ringing claim that "La historia me absolverá" ("History will absolve me"). Coming at the end of a 240-minute harangue, the final sentence was what was remembered. The judges sentenced Castro to 15 years.

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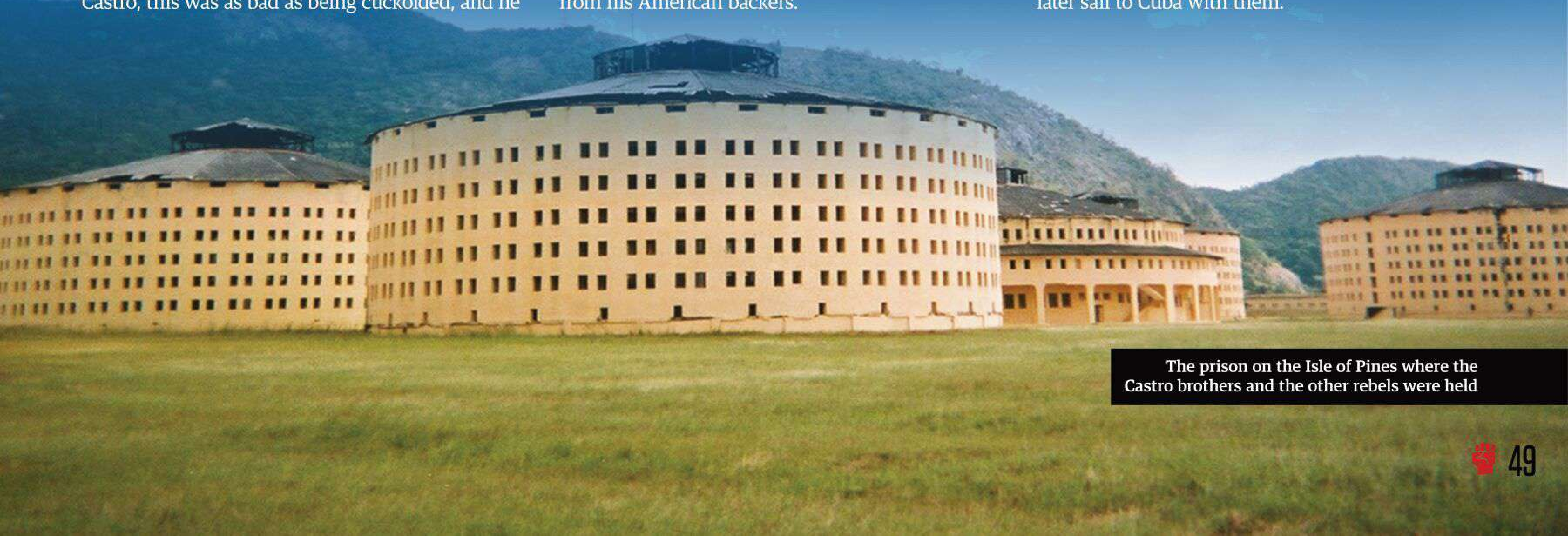
# OUT OF JAIL

## For General Batista, Castro was just another failed revolutionary

In prison, Castro began organising the 26th of July Movement (MR-26-7), mythologising abject failure into the start of a powerful revolution. With his fellow inmates under his direct control, Castro managed to remain in charge of the wider movement by letter.

However, Castro's inflexible self-belief received a severe blow when he learned that his wife, Mirta, had started working for the government. For Castro, this was as bad as being cuckolded, and he began divorce proceedings. Meanwhile, General Batista was looking to improve the image of his government after holding presidential elections in which he was the only candidate. One obvious way was to release Castro: he had clearly been neutered as a serious rival – who would want to follow a man who had engineered such a disastrous failure? – and releasing him would garner Batista some good publicity both from the Cuban press and from his American backers.

So, on 15 May 1955, Castro and the rest of the prisoners were released. Back in Havana, Castro gave interviews and press conferences, and created an 11-man directorate for MR-26-7, with himself firmly in charge. With the situation in Cuba becoming more dangerous, Castro decided to follow his brother, Raúl, into exile in Mexico, there to make a fateful friendship with an Argentinian doctor named Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, who would later sail to Cuba with them.


**The prison on the Isle of Pines where the Castro brothers and the other rebels were held**

People waving homemade versions of the M-26-7 flag as they celebrate the overthrow of General Batista

Another version of the M-26-7 flag being waved after Batista's downfall

"They say that I was a terrible president of Cuba. That may be true. But I was the best president Cuba ever had" – Carlos Prío Socarrás

The flag of the 26th of July Movement, or M-26-7

# M-26-7

Not many other people would name a movement after a catastrophic failure. Castro did

Written by
**EDOARDO ALBERT**

It was 1 September 1956 and Fidel Castro was standing naked in the cold waters of the Río Bravo, the river separating Mexico and the United States. Shivering, looking out over the expanse of water, black and turbid in the moonless night, Castro must have wondered for an instant if there was any sacrifice too great for the political organisation he had founded, the 26th of July Movement. He shook his head. No, there wasn't. Then he slipped silently into the water and swam across the river to the United States.

Waiting for him on the other bank were the men of one of his greatest enemies. But on the principle that the enemy of my enemy is my friend, Castro had reached out to Carlos Prío Socarrás, president of Cuba until his deposition by General Batista in 1952, and a man whom Castro had castigated mercilessly in print and in speech for the corruption and the endemic political violence during his time in office. However, Prío had sworn revenge on Batista. What's more, Prío had taken the money to fund a revenge attack with him into exile in the US.

Castro needed the money. The mass arrests of members of the 26th of July Movement carried out by the Mexican Ministry of the Interior in the summer of 1956, and the money needed to extricate them all from prison afterwards, had severely depleted the funds available to M-26-7. Realising this, Castro had written to Prío from prison, telling him that he'd be willing to take some money from him - though it had to be cash. No cheques. Despite the tone of Castro's letter, Prío indicated that he was willing to meet the young man he had heard so much about. But, unfortunately, the terms of his exile precluded him leaving the United States.

Which was why, a few weeks later, Fidel Castro was swimming across the Río Bravo. He was met at the far bank by some fellow Cubans who dressed him up as a proper Texan, in jeans and a Stetson, and drove him to the Palm Hotel in McAllen, the capital of Hidalgo County. The two men, the deposed president and the man intending to depose the current president, met in Prío's room, where they discussed terms, settling finally on $50,000. Money matters settled, Castro asked Prío if he wanted to join his expedition back to Cuba. Of course, Prío refused - he was willing to blow some money on this foolish venture, but he wasn't going to lose his life for it. Castro then hurried back to Mexico, leaving one of his compatriots to bring the cash.

This venture pretty much sums up the 26th of July Movement: outward idealism and secret pragmatism all in service of a plan so ludicrous that only a madman would expect it to succeed. But Castro did. That, more than anything else, was his great secret. He really believed. He really, truly believed that he was the man who would bring revolution to Cuba and he continued to believe that despite the manifest evidence to the contrary.

Indeed, so great was his belief that Castro named his nascent movement after the sort of debacle that would have ended anyone else's political career. This self-confidence was so overwhelming that Castro could convince other people to share it, putting aside the evidence of their memories for the vision he held out in front of them. It was astonishing.

But while Castro held a vision of revolution for his followers, he himself was willing to get down and dirty to ensure the nitty gritty details were right. While mythologising the failure of the attack on the Moncada Barracks, Castro also learned from it. Most importantly, this time he intended to return to an existing island organisation, with clandestine cells of M-26-7 members in place ready to help and join the rebel forces. To this end, Castro maintained contacts with M-26-7 members still in Cuba as they recruited new people to the organisation.

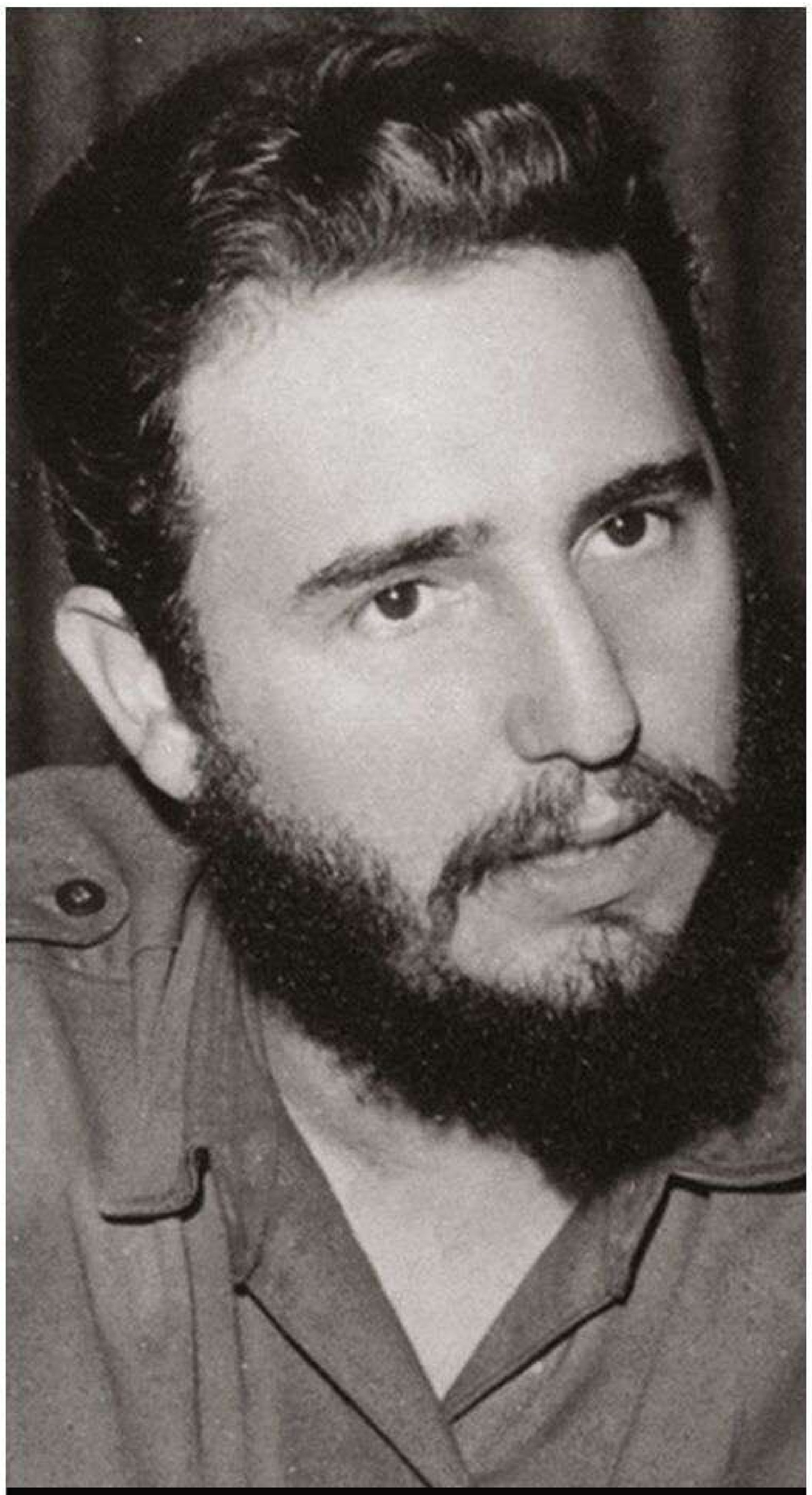
The most important man on the ground for Castro was Frank País, the M-26-7 organiser for Oriente Province where Castro had decided to make his landing. País, who was only 21, had been tireless in his efforts, turning Oriente Province into the major Cuban stronghold of the Movement, but he had done this so quietly that the Cuban authorities were completely unaware of the strength of support for M-26-7 in the region.

Then, early in 1956, País ordered all the clandestine cells in Santiago to paint M-26-7 on the walls in their areas, as well as slogans calling for the overthrow of General Batista. The police woke the next morning to find them throughout the city.

This was a sign of the new-found confidence of Castro's organisation and a further sign that it was willing to strike out on its own. At the start, Castro's movement had sheltered under the cover of the Partido Ortodoxo, the political party that had been Castro's political starting point and whose leader, Eduardo Chibás, Castro still revered. But after the attack on 26 July, Castro's movement gradually became a semi-autonomous element within the Partido Ortodoxo, whose leadership still wanted to pursue democratic and nonviolent means to change the government of General Batista.

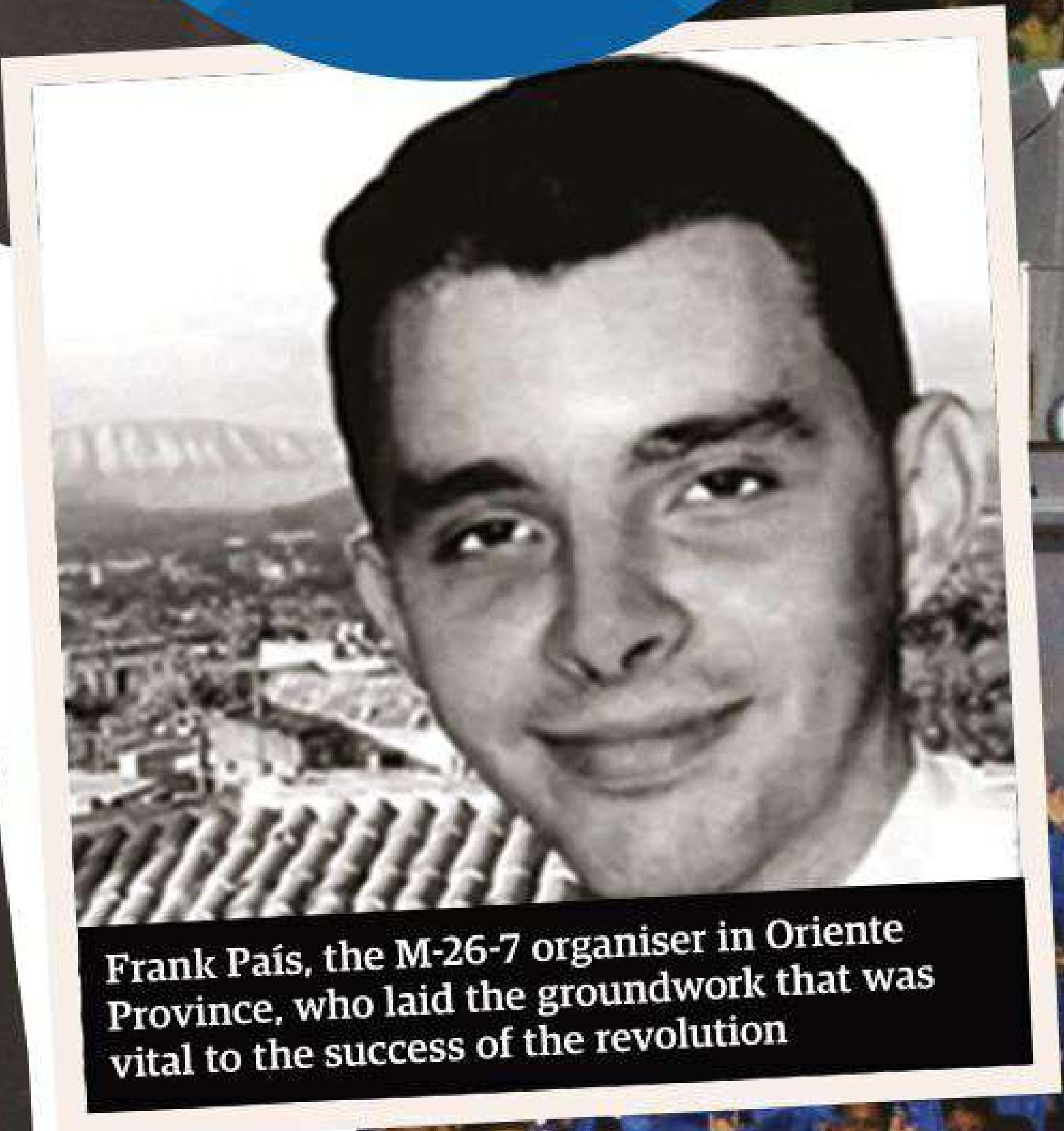
Frank País was captured by the Cuban police late in July 1957 and summarily executed by being shot in the back of the head

Although in exile in Mexico, Castro sent a message to the Ortodoxo congress in August 1955 in which he challenged the party leadership's advocacy of nonviolence. He galvanised the delegates to the congress. He had dismissed the call, being made by the leadership of the party, for a new general election


Fidel Castro with the newly grown beard that would come to define his public image to the world

The Granma was bought using money donated by Carlos Prío Socarrás, the president of Cuba who had been overthrown by General Batista

Former Cuban president Carlos Prío Socarrás bankrolled Castro's expedition back to Cuba


Frank País, the M-26-7 organiser in Oriente Province, who laid the groundwork that was vital to the success of the revolution

The Granma on display during a 50th anniversary of the revolution parade in Cuba

# CASTRO'S WOMEN

## El Comandante was commanding in other areas, too

A journalist once asked Castro how many children he had fathered. He answered that it wasn't a tribe – less than a dozen. While Castro was happy to be the face of the Cuban Revolution, he kept his personal affairs, and they were many, secret. A state secret. The Cuban media was forbidden to say anything about Castro's personal life.

Castro's first wife, Mirta Diaz-Balart, produced one son, but the couple divorced after the imprisoned Fidel discovered that she had accepted a job in the Cuban government – in fact, he flew into such a rage that it seemed he saw himself cuckolded by a state he hated. With his second wife, Dalia Soto del Valle, Castro had five sons. But there were many lovers during and between the marriages, and at least three of these liaisons produced children, perhaps most notably the affair with Cuban socialite Natalia Revuelta Clews, who gave birth to Castro's daughter, Alina Fernández.

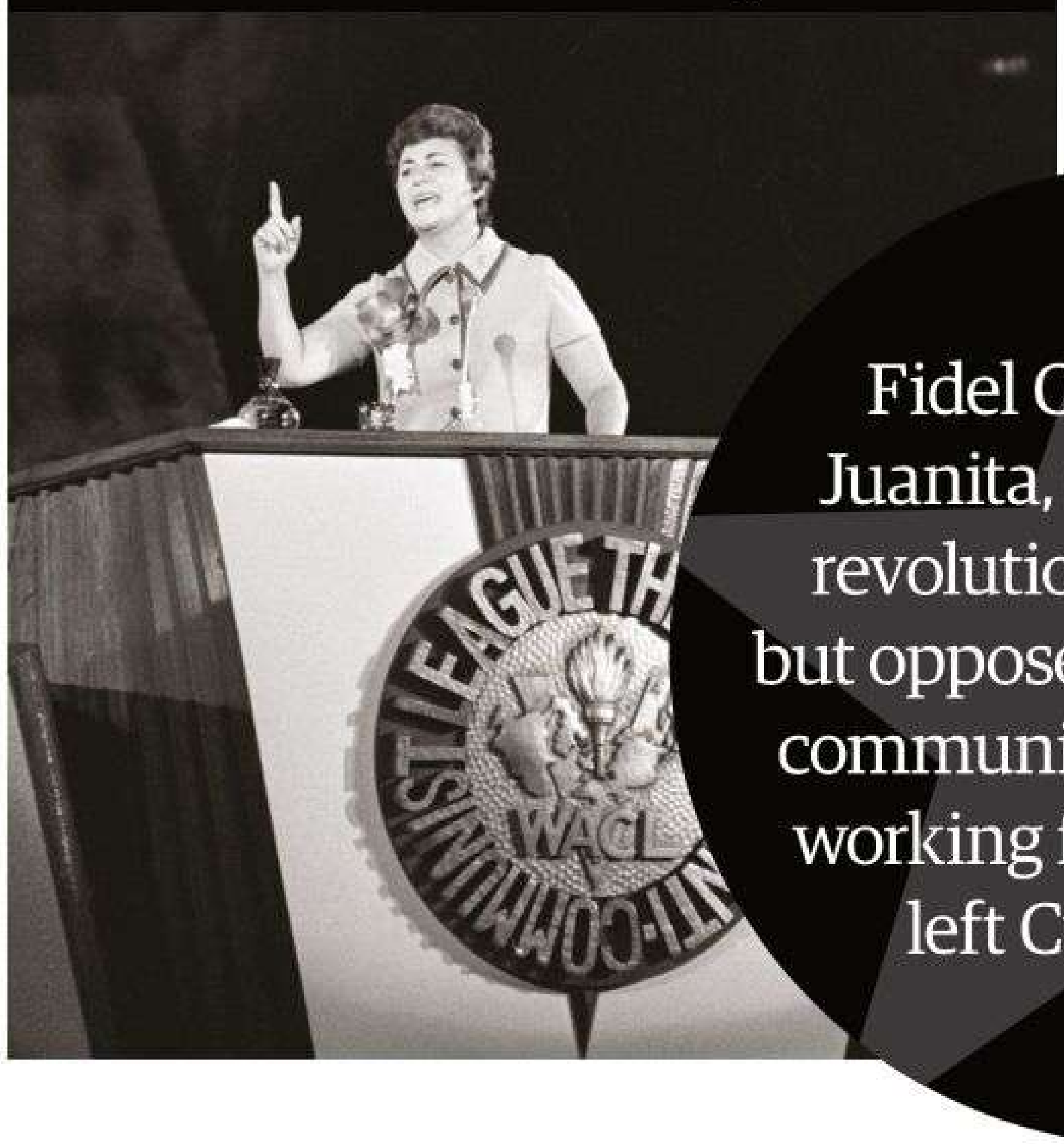
Of all Castro's children, Alina seems to be the one who took after her father: she too was a natural rebel. Even as a young girl, Alina said she wanted to leave Cuba. Castro, who took little interest in raising his children, dispatched her to France for a year. Alina returned a beautiful young woman and began working as a model. Then Castro saw a picture of Alina, dressed in a bikini, posing on a yacht in an advertisement for Havana Club rum. El Comandante was livid and they had the mother of all rows. Castro accused her of lowering his name and Alina hit back that at least now he was taking an interest in her life.

Castro took even more interest when he learned, a few years later, that Alina was planning to defect. He gave orders that she not be allowed to leave Cuba but, on Christmas Eve 1993, Alina slipped out of the country wearing a wig and showing Spanish papers. In exile, Alina was one of Castro's most forthright critics, labelling her father a tyrant. A true rebel.

Castro's daughter, Alina Fernández, leads a protest against the Castro regime in Cuba

Dalia Soto del Valle (right), Castro's second wife, who has born him five sons. The man smoking the cigar on the left is one of them: Alexander Castro

Castro's sister Juanita, who escaped to the US and became a vocal critic of her brother's regime



as the only peaceful solution to Cuba's problem by saying that there was another solution. But this solution would not be peaceful. This was revolution.

The party delegates leaped to their feet, chanting for revolution. When the news was brought back to Castro, he knew the time had come to cast off the restrictions inherent in being part of someone else's political party. On 19 March 1956, he announced that he was breaking with the Partido Ortodoxo and establishing the 26th of July Movement. Of course, the Movement had already been in existence, in embryo form, since before the attack on Moncada Barracks, but now it had come out into the open. The organisers Castro had left in Cuba were instructed specifically to seek out members of the Partido Ortodoxo, to bring them into M-26-7. Most of the elements were now in place. All that remained was the final stage: the return of Castro.

But tension was rising. In Cuba, three members of Batista's government had been murdered. Batista was putting increased pressure on the Mexican authorities to shut down the cabal of Cuban conspirators in their country. The Mexican police started to arrest Castro's people – the net was closing in. Castro ordered his men to make for Tuxpan, the port from which they were going to leave. But even as Castro gave the order, the Movement started falling apart around him.

Two members disappeared for the United States, taking some of the stored weapons with them. Then a third man vanished. Castro began to fear that his organisation had been hopelessly compromised by the CIA. It was time to move. Castro pulled Che Guevara from the safe house where he was hiding and set off for Tuxpan. Meanwhile, the chief of the Mexican police was receiving reports that exiled Cubans were arriving in large numbers in Tuxpan. But… mañana. It could wait.

Once again, Castro's luck held. He was going to have the chance to join his men aboard the good ship Granma. Only, when they saw the vessel, they realised it wasn't good at all, and certainly not fit to hold as many men as were there to board it. But Castro insisted, with the blind faith that moved people and, in the end, events, that the boat would take everyone and that it would get them to Cuba. 82 men crammed onboard with their assorted weapons and, at 2am on 25 November 1956, the Granma set sail. The invasion had begun.

> Castro's reputation as a great orator was deserved in early life but, once leader of Cuba, people had little choice but to sit and listen to his interminable speeches

> Fidel Castro's sister, Juanita, supported the revolution to start with but opposed its embrace of communism. She started working for the CIA, and left Cuba in 1964

© Getty Images, NuNuX

# BLOOD BROTHERS

The friendship between Fidel Castro and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara would come to define both men, and the Cuban Revolution

Written by
**EDOARDO ALBERT**

Castro's main complaint against his exile in Mexico was his inability to buy Cuban cigars there

What is believed to be the first photograph of Fidel Castro (left) and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara together, taken when they were held in jail in Mexico City

In Mexico City, Guevara made money working shifts in the hospital, supplementing his meagre salary by taking photos for an Argentinian news agency or hawking portraits to courting couples

*"I no longer believe in general elections… there is no option but that of [18]68 and that of [18]95."*

That was the message Castro left to Cuba, printed in the publication *Bohemia*, just before he left to go into exile. He was now committed to violent revolution. The problem, so far as Castro was concerned, was not the lives that might be lost, but simply how to bring it about. The question vexed him as he flew out from Havana, travelling via Venezuela to Veracruz on the coast of Mexico. From there, he went to Mexico City, arriving on 8 July 1955.

Many of his old comrades were already in Mexico and Castro had left instructions for the members of MR-26-7 remaining in Cuba to organise and prepare for his return. In Mexico City, he set about establishing and improving his contacts with Cuban exiles, Cubans at home and anyone else who might prove useful. Eighteen days later, on the anniversary of the attack on Moncada Barracks, Castro attended a gathering at the house of two other Cuban exiles. Among the guests was a young Argentine, Ernesto Guevara, who had become friends with Raúl Castro, and some of the other members of MR-26-7.

The road that had brought Guevara to Mexico City was long and winding, and it took in most of South and Central America. Born on 14 June 1928 to a middle-class Argentinian family, Guevara grew up in an intellectual milieu. Despite suffering from severe asthma, he was an excellent sportsman, playing rugby union, swimming, cycling and golf. It was by perseverance and will power that Guevara learned to manage his asthma, a lesson he would apply to the rest of his life. As a medical student, the young Guevara took time out from his studies to embark upon two long motorcycle journeys through South America, the first solo, the second with his friend Alberto Granado, during which he saw first hand the poverty of the rural and industrial poor. The experience played a major part in radicalising him. Guevara wrote up his journeys in diaries that were later published as *The Motorcycle Diaries*. The journey was only the beginning.

The restless young man was still looking for a cause to attach himself to. Guevara found that cause in Fidel Castro

# MAKING CLERKS INTO SOLDIERS

## In exile, Castro set about training his followers in the tactics of guerrilla warfare

Castro and Guevara were both committed to armed confrontation by this point, their commitment cemented by the other man's enthusiasm

Although he had mythologised the attack on Moncada Barracks, making its date the name of his political movement, at some level Castro understood that the whole undertaking had been a fiasco. He knew that when he returned to Cuba, he needed better-trained men. To that end, he recruited General Alberto Bayo, an expert in guerrilla warfare. Bayo had fought in the Spanish Civil War and various insurrections in North Africa. He had lost an eye in combat, but still flew stunt planes and, despite his white hair, was as fierce as in his youth. Castro, to Bayo's infinite surprise, managed to infect the general with his own enthusiasm, and he agreed to train his men.

Bayo started with drill and physical fitness training. When more military training was required, Castro sent Guevara, disguised as a colonel of the Salvadoran Army, to buy a ranch south-east of Mexico City. The band of recruits moved to the ranch to begin their serious military training. This involved night marches, further physical conditioning, marksmanship, and all the other rigours of boot camp.

Guevara thrived. Castro put him in charge of the men and he proved a strict disciplinarian. Indeed, when one of the men said he was unable to continue during a march, Guevara confined him, called Castro and convened a court martial, which handed down a death sentence. The man's sentence was commuted just before his execution, but he was held under guard. Guevara was training himself in ruthlessness. Once a doctor dedicated to saving life, he had decided that mercy had no place in the revolution.

Guevara's most defining characteristic was his restlessness. Having completed his medical studies in Argentina, he set out again, eventually ending up in Guatemala, where he witnessed, and railed against, the overthrow of the reformist Árbenz government by American-backed forces. This served to further radicalise Guevara, as well as cement his hatred for the United States. By the time he left Guatemala for Mexico, Guevara was a convinced communist, although not actually a member of the Communist Party. The restless young man was still looking for a cause to attach himself to.

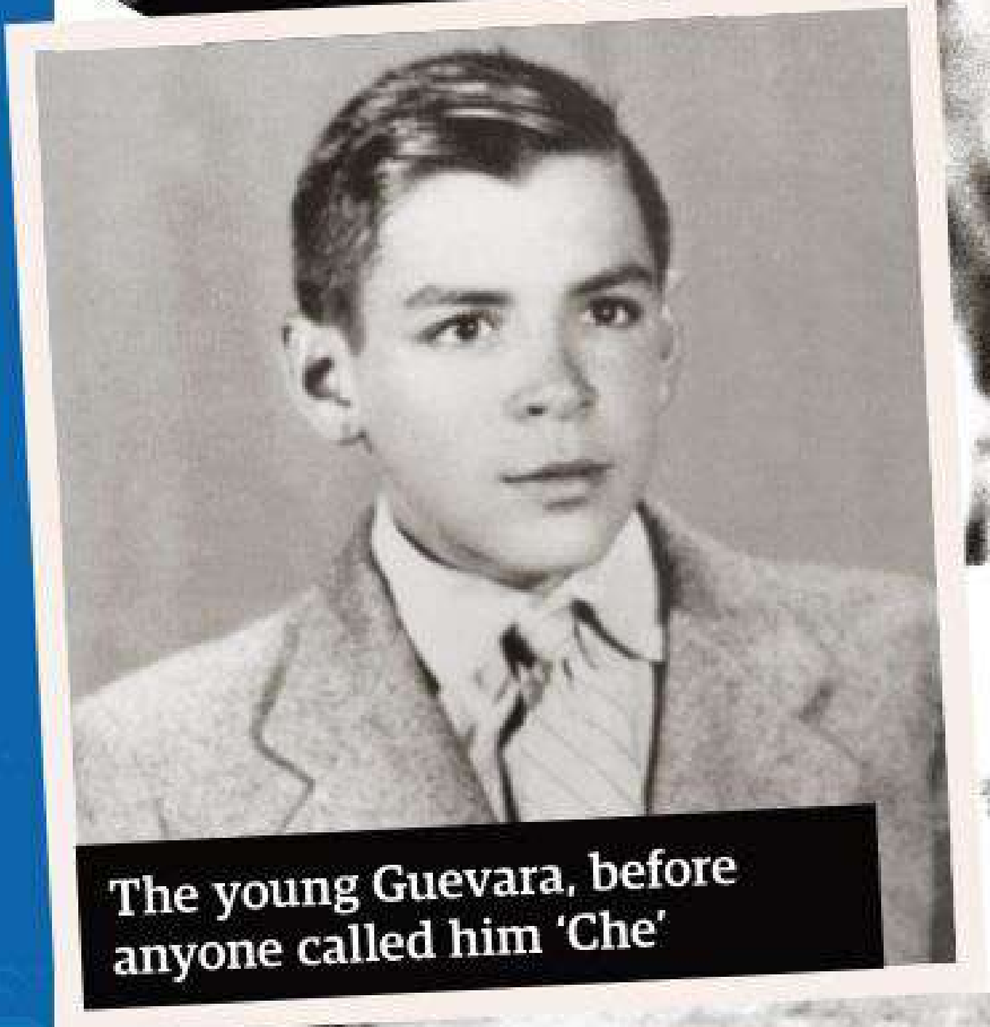
Guevara found that cause in Fidel Castro. He had perhaps been introduced to Castro at the house party to commemorate the 26 July attack on the barracks, but it was a few days later that the two men met properly in an apartment at 49 José de Emparán Street. Despite it being July, it was a cold night. Castro was recovering from a bout of flu but still dominated the gathering. He spotted Guevara and pulled him over, telling the young Argentinian his plans to overthrow Batista. The conversation continued through the evening and on into the night, adjourning to a nearby restaurant where the conversation continued to the early hours. Castro quizzed Guevara about his experiences during his travels, asked him about communism – the Argentinian was much better versed in the arcana of dialectical materialism than Castro – and overwhelmed him with his energy. By the end of the night, Guevara already sensed that he might have found the cause his restless energy was seeking. He invited Castro to dinner and, over dinner, Guevara's Guatemalan girlfriend, Hilda, asked Castro a pointed question. What was he doing in Mexico when the struggle was in Cuba?

Castro said the question was a very good one, so he would explain. He explained for four hours. Rather than being bored, Guevara, listening quietly beside Hilda, was captivated. A few days later Guevara told Hilda of his new-found friend, "We are in complete accord. It's only someone like him I could go all out for."

There was, however, a small fly in Guevara's revolutionary ointment: Hilda told him she was pregnant. In response, Guevara agreed to marry her. He wrote in his diary: "In the end she gets her way – the way I see it, for a short while, although she hopes it will be lifelong." For the inveterately footloose Guevara, Castro's proposed expedition back to Cuba was taking on the guise of a get-out clause from the closing net of family obligations.

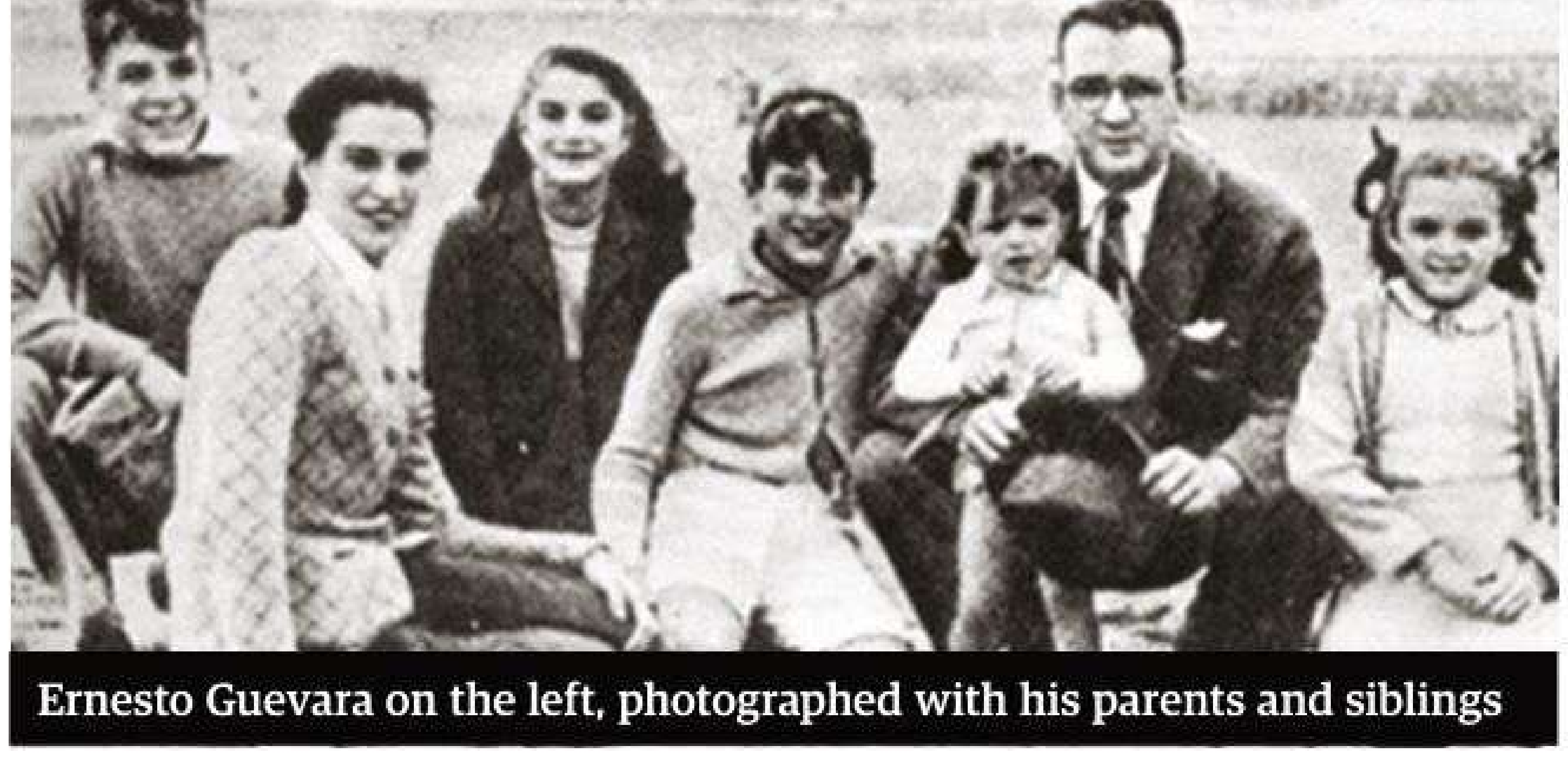
With Ernesto and Hilda Guevara's apartment becoming one of the key nodes of Castro's MR-26-7 movement, the other Cuban exiles soon all heard the Argentinian's characteristic use of 'Che'. In Spanish, it is a diminutive, used colloquially in the same way that an

> Mexico City became home to many exiles fleeing fascism in Europe as well as, most famously, Leon Trotsky



The young Guevara, before anyone called him 'Che'

Ernesto Guevara, age 22



Ernesto Guevara on the left, photographed with his parents and siblings

Guevara sitting astride the motorised bicycle that he rode for his first solo motorbike trip in South America

American might call out 'bro' or someone from Britain say 'mate'. It can also be used to call someone's attention, rather like saying, 'hey'. Thus, if you wanted to attract Pedro's notice, you might call out, 'Che, Pedro, ¡mirá!' Che is also used as a filler, like the Canadian 'eh'. With Guevara using Che all the time, his new Cuban comrades began to apply the nickname to him. Soon, Ernesto Guevara was known throughout the MR-26-7 movement as 'Che' Guevara. The nickname stuck. To this day, Guevara is known throughout South America as 'el Che'. Despite his hatred of American capitalism, he had taken his first steps towards creating the Che brand – a brand that would be completed by the signature beret and moustache, and finished off by a set of cheekbones to die for. It's unlikely that the revolutionary image emblazoned on millions of T-shirts would have fared nearly so well if the face beneath the beret had been that of Castro's other right-hand man, his brother Raúl, who never seemed able to shake off the appearance of an eager ferret in his photographs.

While Castro went off on fundraising trips, Guevara maintained some small elements of his old life, continuing to do shifts at the hospital as well as medical research. There had been a time when the young man thought he might make his mark on the world through knowledge, by making a significant medical breakthrough. Indeed, Guevara was offered a full-time research post at the hospital, but he turned it down. He was realising that he did not have the patience for either scientific research or his other former love: poetry. Action – direct, bloody, sacrificial action – was what he craved.

In Guevara's mind, the stories of South American revolts and the theories of Marxist revolution were melding into a romantic vision of his future as part of Castro's struggle to overthrow Batista. The doctor, the humanitarian, the man whose heart bled for the poor was becoming a revolutionary. Salvation was going to come by the gun.

For his part, Castro had now taken the Argentinian deeply into his confidence. As the group of exiles began military training, Castro appointed Guevara his chief lieutenant. Then disaster struck. Castro, Guevara and the rest of MR-26-7 were arrested. Batista had been putting pressure on the Mexican government to crack down on the increasingly troublesome exiles. However, a former Mexican president interceded on behalf of the Cubans and after three weeks in detention all were released apart from Castro, Guevara and another Cuban who had the wrong visa.

While in exile in Mexico, Raúl Castro's favourite pastime was attending bullfights. So enamoured was he of corridas that he would flourish his jacket at passing cars while shouting, 'Olé!'

The Castro of Mexican exile was clean shaven with a thin moustache; Guevara did not even sport a moustache at the time, and his hair was cut short

For two weeks, the three men were confined together. The friendship between Castro and Guevara deepened, but their differences became clearer too. Guevara was, by this time, the committed communist revolutionary. Castro, on the other hand, wanted to keep links with anti-Batista forces in Cuba who were also anti-communist. Castro was released on 24 July, while Guevara was kept in prison. However, Castro had resolved not to abandon the man who had become his friend. Although committed to the scheme to return to Cuba, and hugely impatient for it to begin, Castro would not leave until he had extricated Guevara from prison. The Argentinian was finally released on 31 July. It seems highly likely that Castro paid for his release.

But with Batista's agents now working to neutralise MR-26-7, everything depended on speed. Castro had promised to return to Cuba by the end of the year. On 25 November 1956, he set sail with Guevara and 80 other men for Cuba. It was time, as Guevara said, to "stop whining and fight".

© Getty Images, Niels Elgaard Larsen

The motorised bicycle Guevara used for his first trip is now on display at the Che Guevara Museum in Alta Gracia, Argentina

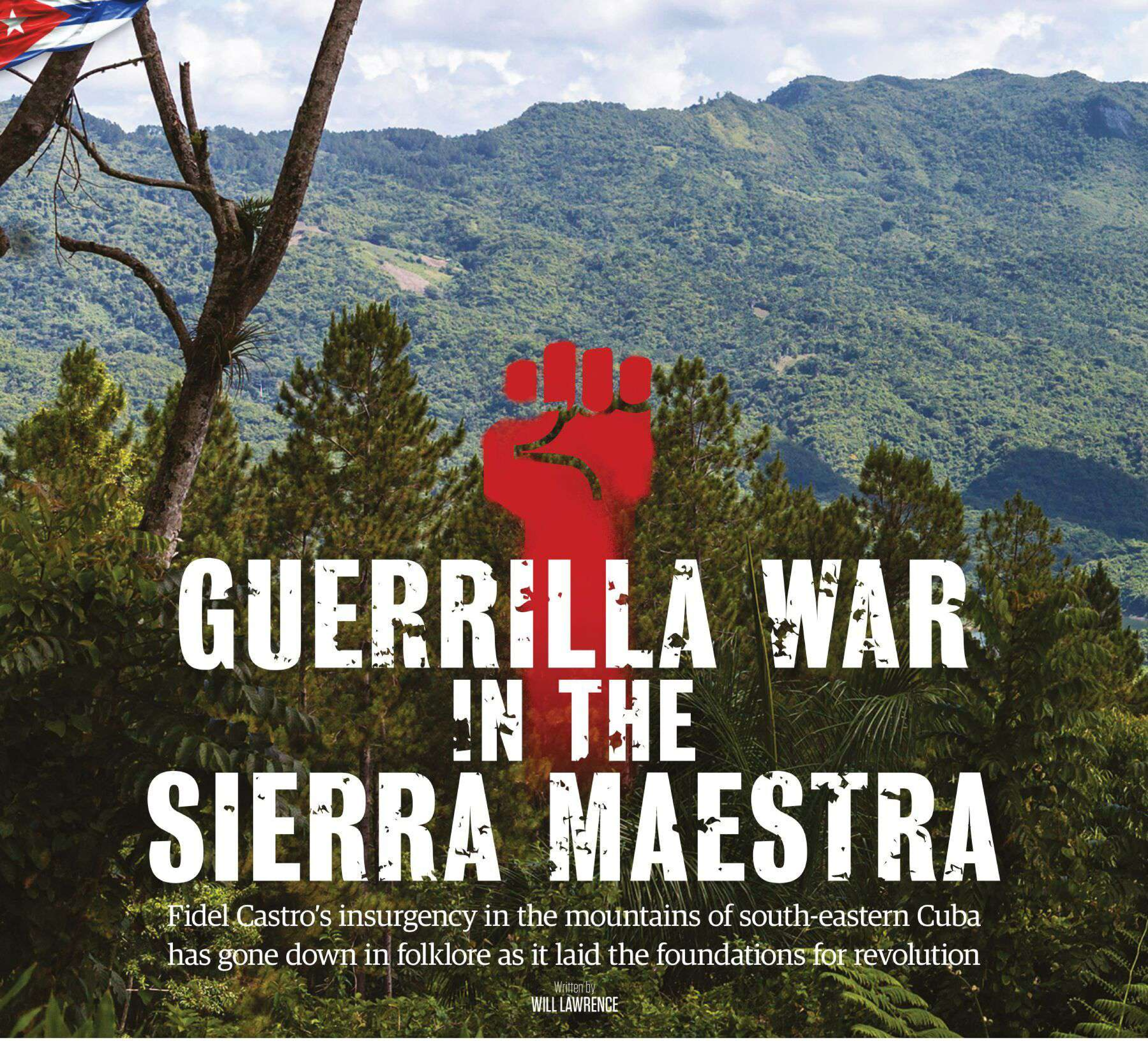
Guevara with his wife Hilda on their honeymoon in 1955

Guevara attempting to kick-start the 500cc Norton that carried him for the second of his motorcycle adventures

Guevara (right) with his friend and travelling companion Alberto Granado sailing down the Amazon River on a wooden raft

M-26

A group of armed rebel soldiers gather in the lobby of Havana's Hilton, the capital's tallest hotel, after entering the city in January 1959. The Hilton could be seen from all around Havana, standing as a symbol of America's influence. In 1960 Castro changed the hotel's name to Habana Libre meaning 'Free Havana'.



# GUERRILLA WAR IN THE SIERRA MAESTRA

Fidel Castro's insurgency in the mountains of south-eastern Cuba has gone down in folklore as it laid the foundations for revolution

Written by
**WILL LAWRENCE**

Cuba has witnessed many secret landings in its turbulent past, but very few unfolded with as much misfortune as Fidel Castro's 'Granma Landing' on 2 December 1956. Yet from this calamitous event, a triumph was born, and Castro's ignoble return to his native isle has since evolved in the history books to become an epic moment, lauded by millions across Latin America and beyond. Castro was the captain on the Granma yacht ferrying 81 other guerrilla volunteers across the 1,200-plus mile stretch from Tuxpan in Mexico to the mangrove swamps south of Playa Las Coloradas. Like the great political thinker and revolutionary José Martí some 60 years earlier, Castro had come to claim Cuba for its people.

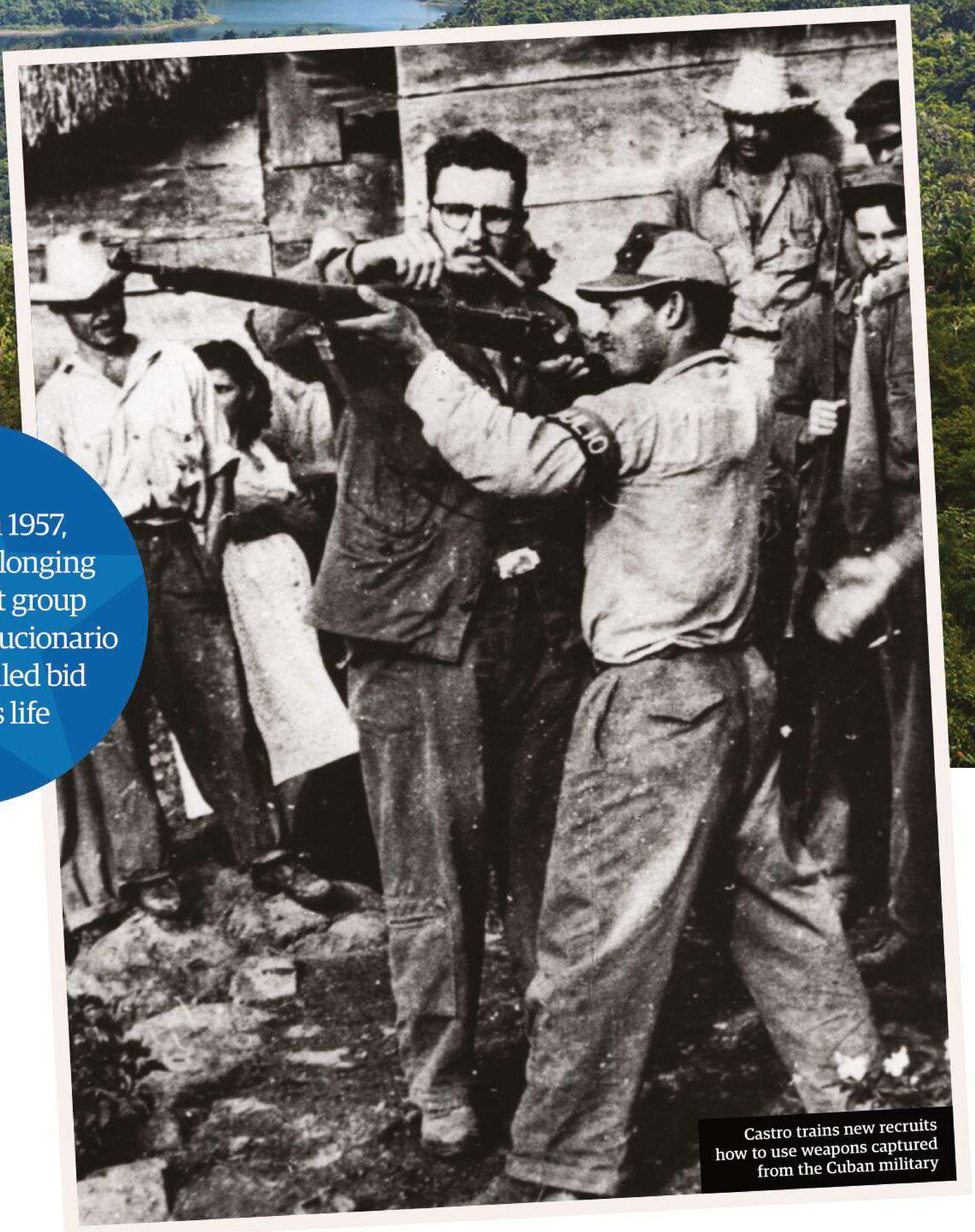
And yet, his well-laid plan had soon gone awry. The Granma landing was timed to coincide with an uprising in Santiago on 30 November, proclaimed by Frank País, one of the leaders of the 26th of July Movement, which aimed an attack on the police HQ and another raid on the Moncada Barracks. Yet Castro could not control the weather conditions and stormy seas slowed his voyage. He arrived two days late in the wrong location, and though País had successfully whipped up a storm in the city, Castro's no-show and a fierce counter-attack by Batista's local forces had forced the urban rebels up into the mountains.

Events took an even tougher turn for Castro when his storm-tossed troops came under heavy attack, on land and from the air, almost as soon as they landed. Many died and more than 20 were taken prisoner. The remainder battled their way through the swampland and licked their wounds at what they hoped was a friendly estate called Alegría de Pío, yet here they fell into another ambush. With an ever-dwindling number of volunteers left in his landing party, the outlook appeared bleak for Castro.

Local peasants, however, came to their rescue, leading the beleaguered rebels into the mountains of the Sierra Maestra. On 12 December, the ragged remainder of Castro's volunteers finally met up with fellow freedom fighters – notably the local rebel leader Crescencio Pérez, who controlled vast swathes of the western mountains – and a few days before Christmas, the group tucked into a feast and hailed the "commencement of the victory of the revolution".

That success ignited when País's urban rebels of the 26th of July Movement struck once more.

Castro launched his guerrilla operations from the mountains and jungles of the Sierra Maestra



Castro trains new recruits how to use weapons captured from the Cuban military

On 13 March 1957, armed men belonging to the terrorist group Directorio Revolucionario launched a failed bid on Batista's life

On Christmas Eve they encouraged strike action and planted several bombs that caused blackouts across the country. On New Year's Eve they then bombed hotels in Havana and Santiago. Batista, however, responded with brutality, crushing anyone he suspected of sympathising with the rebels, though neither he nor his backers in the US were overly worried. Many even presumed that Castro was dead.

But Castro was very much alive and he and his chief commanders – the likes of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos and Raúl Castro – embarked on a strategy that would earn the future ruler comparisons with the folk hero Robin Hood. Certainly, it was during these early days in the Sierra Maestra that the seeds of the Castro legend were sown. He and his men suffered great hardship as they trekked from camp to camp, constantly moving to evade a showdown with the Cuban army. They secured local support from the peasant population and conducted hit-and-run raids against the military, boosting their arsenal with each incursion. They lost men, but grew in strength as volunteers entered the mountains to pledge their support. When they captured Cuban soldiers, they often treated them with kindness and respect. Castro kept the image of José Martí at the centre of his thinking, and he acted accordingly.

> "Batista formed death squads, known as Los Tigres, which delivered misery and repression in Santiago and the countryside"

And if Castro remembered Martí, his enemy remembered the cruel Valeriano Weyler, whose concentration camps had caused such an outcry in the US during the second War of Independence. Batista adopted Weyler's ruthless policy towards the populace and relocated many families from the Sierra Maestra onto the lowland slopes in a bid to deprive the rebels of food. Batista also formed paramilitary death squads, known as Los Tigres, under the leadership of Rolando Masferrer, who delivered misery and repression in Santiago and the nearby countryside.

Castro and his 'Fidelistas' saw their morale severely tested, though it received a major boost throughout January 1957 as they launched a sortie on the 17th, attacking the small coastal barracks at La Plata. As they embarked on their mission they vowed first to kill three local mayorales, plantation foremen that Guevara described as "the terror of the peasants". The trio worked for big business operations, so removing them would win the revolutionaries further support among the local population.

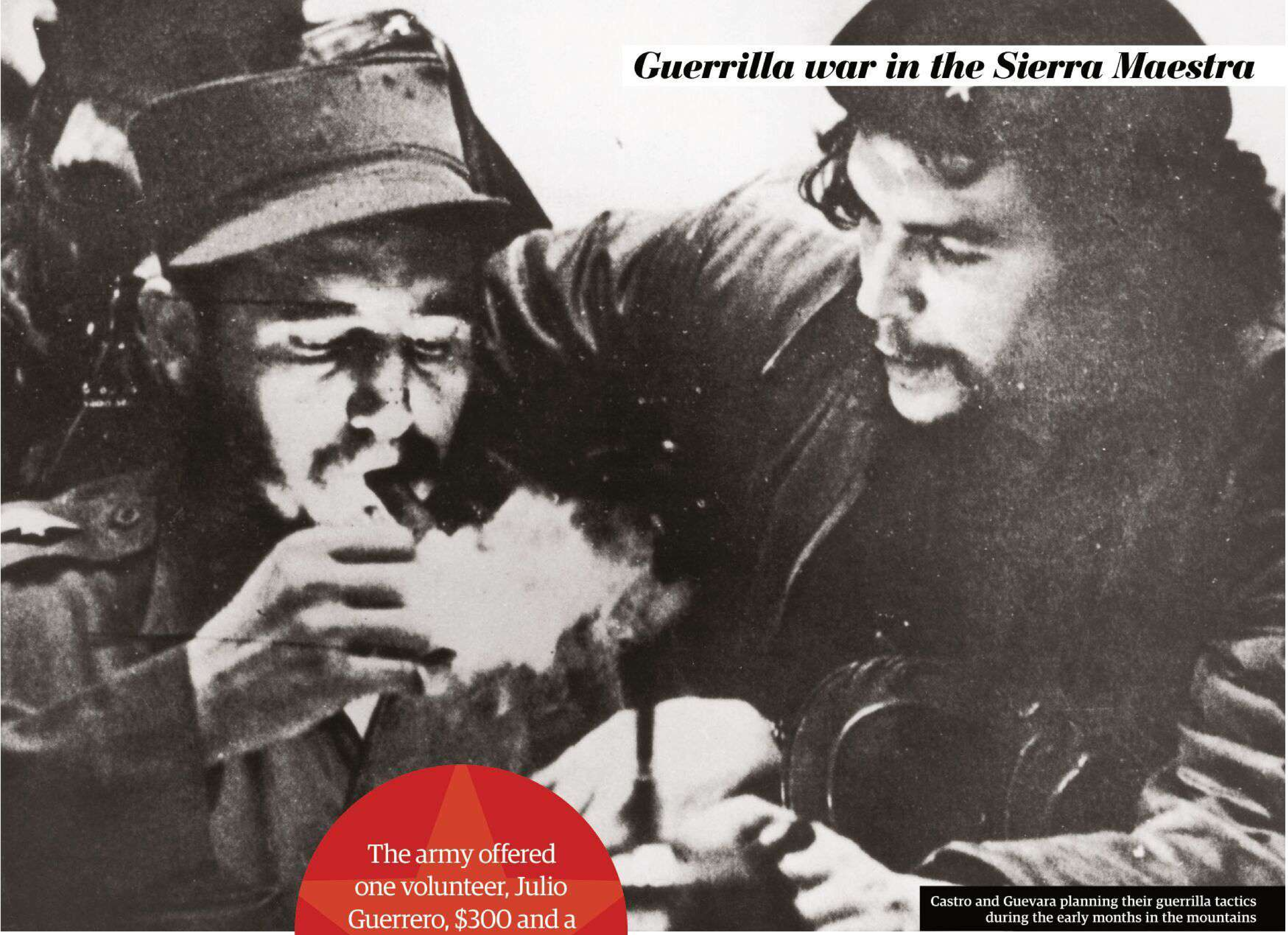
Prior to the attack on La Plata, the rebels captured one of the mayorales, Chicho Osorio, who was riding on a mule and was full of liquor. Persuading the drunken man that they were members of the rural guard on their way to inspect the barracks at La Plata, they pressed Osorio for information and used him as a guide. At 2.40am, Fidel and his men launched their attack, fanning out and spraying the rickety buildings with machine gun fire. They ordered the men inside to surrender, but were answered with gunfire.

Though the rebel numbers were small – Castro had no more than 20 combat-ready men – they outthought the handful of soldiers inside and the battle was soon over. The rebels set ablaze what they thought was a house belonging to another of the hated mayorales and, though it turned out to only be a store house, the defenders panicked, with many of them fleeing into the darkness. By the time the fighting was over, two soldiers had been killed and five were wounded, three mortally. The rebels, who had lost no men, triumphantly set the barracks on fire before marching their prisoners up into the hills. The captives were well treated, given medical supplies, and then released. Castro, though, knew there would be reprisals, and was disheartened to meet clutches of fleeing families who warned them that the government was set to bomb the area. On 22 January, the rebels scored another small victory, as they successfully ambushed a troop of soldiers who had been sent to hunt them down.

During February, Castro was finally able to make contact with País, the two men coming together in the mountains. When País returned later in the year he brought with him a reporter from the *New York Times*, Herbert Matthews, and his reports, writes one leading historian, "helped create a lasting image, both in Cuba and abroad, of a charismatic and invincible leader." Matthews described Castro as the most remarkable and romantic figure in Cuban history since Martí. It was a comparison that did much to boost the warrior's image across the Americas. All too aware of newspaper power, Castro at one stage during his meeting with Matthews arranged for a breathless soldier to come bursting in with a message from "the Second Column". Castro

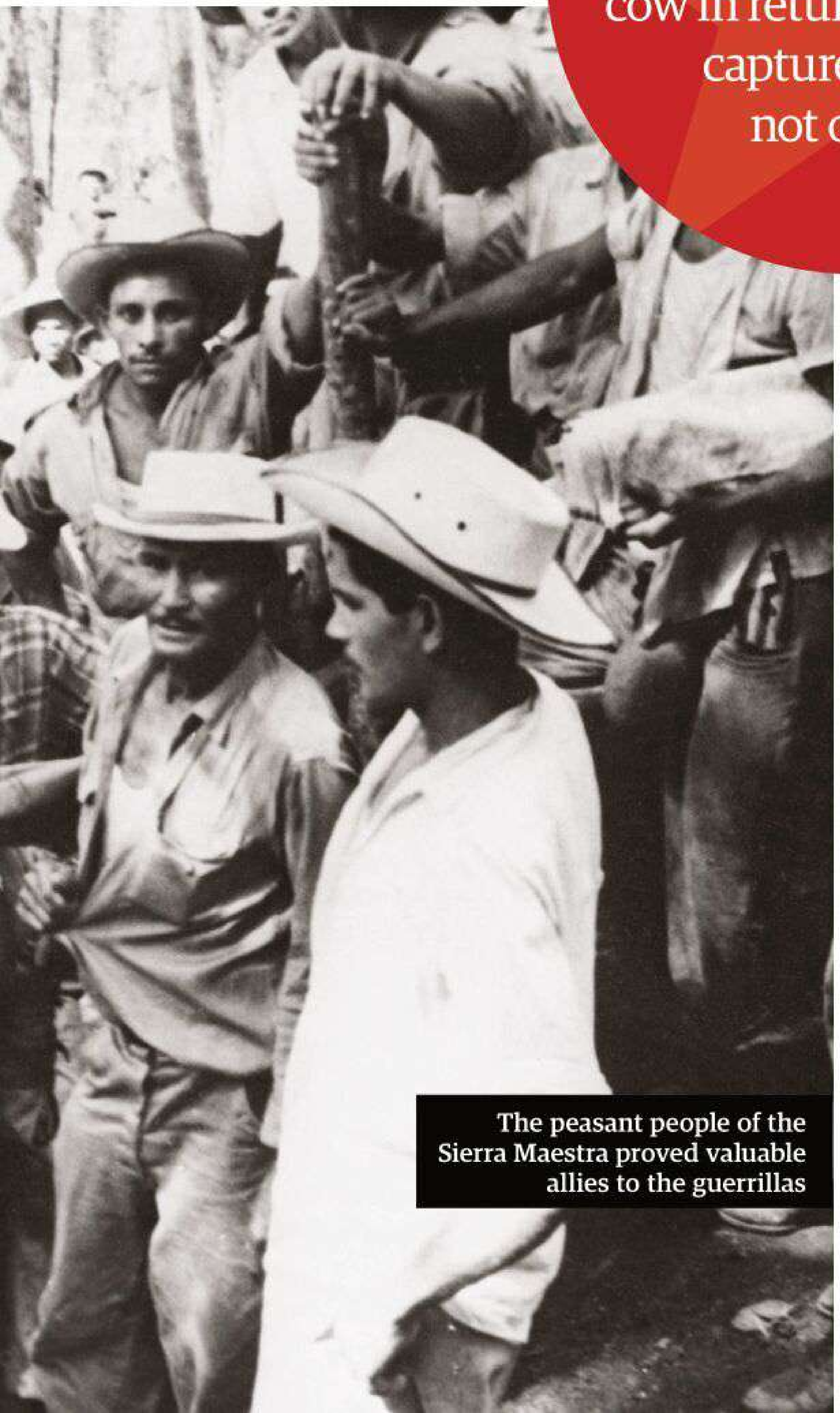
A kerosene-run refrigerator in a hut at La Plata, used by Castro as an HQ in the Sierra Maestra

Fidel Castro promoted Ernesto 'Che' Guevara to the rank of comandante in July 1957



Castro and Guevara planning their guerrilla tactics during the early months in the mountains

The army offered one volunteer, Julio Guerrero, $300 and a cow in return for Castro's capture. He did not oblige!



The peasant people of the Sierra Maestra proved valuable allies to the guerrillas

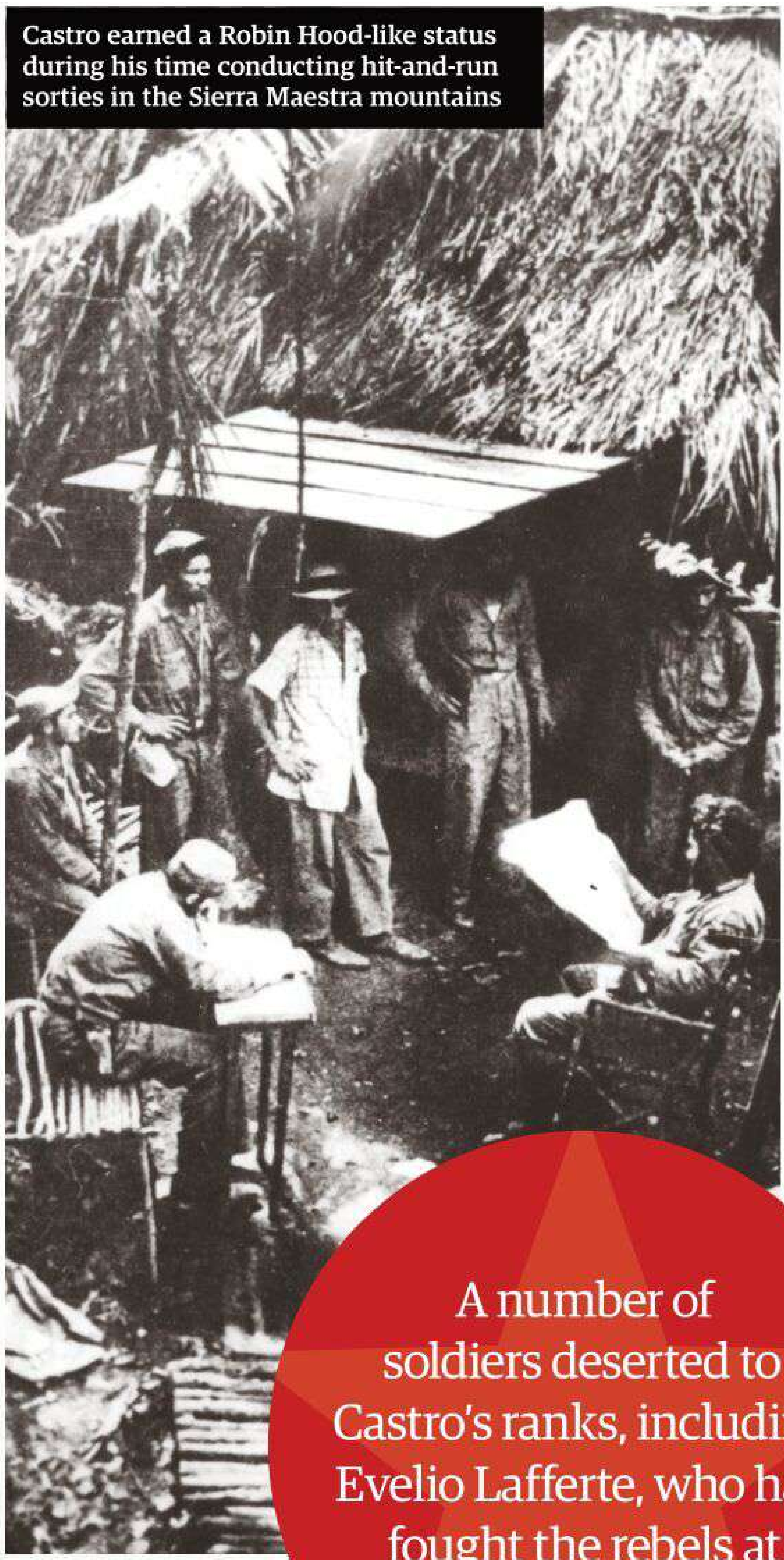
hoped to dupe Matthews, and his readership, into thinking that his army was much larger than the 20 or so men he had at his disposal. Indeed, as soon as the interview finished, Matthews hurried off, desperate to publish his scoop as quickly as possible.

Yet life remained precarious for the rebels. They were grateful for local support but were also aware that many could not be trusted, caught as they were between reprisals from both the revolutionaries and the government. One key example was Eutímio Guerra, a local peasant leader who had served as a guide in the build up to the attack on La Plata. Guerra had been captured by Cuban troops during one sortie and had been promised a reputed $10,000 reward if he could deliver Castro into the army's hands. Guerra turned traitor and helped set up an ambush on a hill called Los Altos de Espinosa. When his treachery was discovered, Guevara shot him in the head.

Life in the forests proved difficult for Guevara in particular, who suffered from asthma, especially in the spring, though both he and his associates received a shot in the arm when Matthews' story broke in the *New York Times*, sending ripples of excitement across Cuba. Not only did the story prove that Castro was alive, but also that his forces were healthy and defiant. It was a major blow for Batista. New recruits came forth and the rebel army swelled to close to 70 men by the end of March 1957, including three teenage American runaways from the US naval base at Guantanamo. Batista, while still claiming publicly that there was nothing to fear from the insurgents, was secretly concerned and commanded Major Barrera Pérez, the man who had calmed the recent 26th of July upheaval in Santiago, to take 1,500 men into the Sierra Maestra in a bid to bring the rebellion to a swift conclusion.

By April, the guerrilla fighters were getting stronger and were boosted further by the arrival of fresh weapons and ammunition, as well as by the appearance of more American reporters, keen to profit from the furore that Matthews' reports had excited in the US press. Castro now planned the guerrillas' biggest operation to date, an attack on the 60-strong coastal garrison at El Uvero. On the morning of 28 May, as dawn broke, Castro fired the shot that signalled the attack. Machine guns rattled in the thin light as the rebels advanced. The man next to Castro, a veteran from the Granma, was shot dead while another was badly wounded, but still they pressed on and just as the rebels prepared for a final charge, the garrison surrendered its arms.

The victory was the rebels' greatest success to date, though it came at a cost: six men had died. The defenders, meanwhile, had lost 14 men



Castro earned a Robin Hood-like status during his time conducting hit-and-run sorties in the Sierra Maestra mountains

with 19 more wounded and a further 14 taken prisoner. Guevara acted as the field doctor and was overwhelmed by the task at hand. Years later, Castro would cite the action at El Uvero as the turning point in his guerrilla war. "This was the victory that marked our coming of age," he said. "From this battle on, our morale grew tremendously; our decisiveness and our hopes for triumph increased also."

In July, a unit under Guevara's command forced the surrender of the garrison at Bueycito, while Castro forged a key alliance with two members of the bourgeois opposition to Batista's regime, signing the 'Sierra Pact' with Raúl Chibás and Felipe Pazos as the pair visited the rebels in the mountains. Though frustrating more radical members of his band, such as Guevara, Castro saw the long-term benefits: he hoped to earn legitimacy among Cuban moderates. In Santiago, actions against the government escalated to commemorate 26 July, and the police responded with force; País was executed in the street on 30 July.

País's death stirred up even more anti-government resentment and there were strikes across the capital. Batista responded by declaring a state of emergency and imposed a media blackout, just as a new American ambassador arrived. From this point onwards, the American government knew Batista could not continue and their support wavered. In August, meanwhile, Guevara ambushed another government unit in the mountains while Castro attacked an army encampment near Las Cuevas.

On 5 September, a national uprising erupted and rebels seized the police HQ and naval base in the city of Cienfuegos, but their cohorts in Santiago and Havana stalled, leaving the conspirators isolated. Batista moved his forces on the city, and sent B-26 bombers into the air. The rebels fought hard but could not hold on. Batista's revenge was barbaric, with torture and the mistreatment of the rebels proving endemic. It was a PR blunder, however, with the Americans furious that their tanks and planes, supplied to protect Cuba from outside threats, had been used to suppress the island's native people. In the mountains, meanwhile, Castro scored another small success at Pino del Agua, though he also had to contend with lawlessness in the mountains as groups of bandits and robbers roamed the hillsides claiming to be members of his group. Castro sought to clean these men out and conducted a number of executions.

As the year turned, Batista appointed a new commander of the anti-guerrilla campaign, the merciless Colonel Alberto del Rio Chaviano, while a $100,000 reward was placed on Castro's head. He had started to bring the war down from the Sierra Maestra, launching raids against troops as far away as Manzanillo and attacking sugar cane trucks on the road. In January, meanwhile, two 26th of July men were captured with a letter that spoke of Guevara's Marxism, and while Castro had been keen to douse those fires, the letter was broadcast nationwide, suggesting that there were serious communist influences within Castro's organisation. The US government did not like what they heard.

Castro and his men, however, pressed on. On 6 February, they launched their first major offensive of the year, attacking Pino del Agua for a second time, using freshly acquired Sputnik rockets, though after an initial breakthrough the rebels were pushed back, with squad leader Camilo

> A number of soldiers deserted to Castro's ranks, including Evelio Lafferte, who had fought the rebels at Pino del Agua

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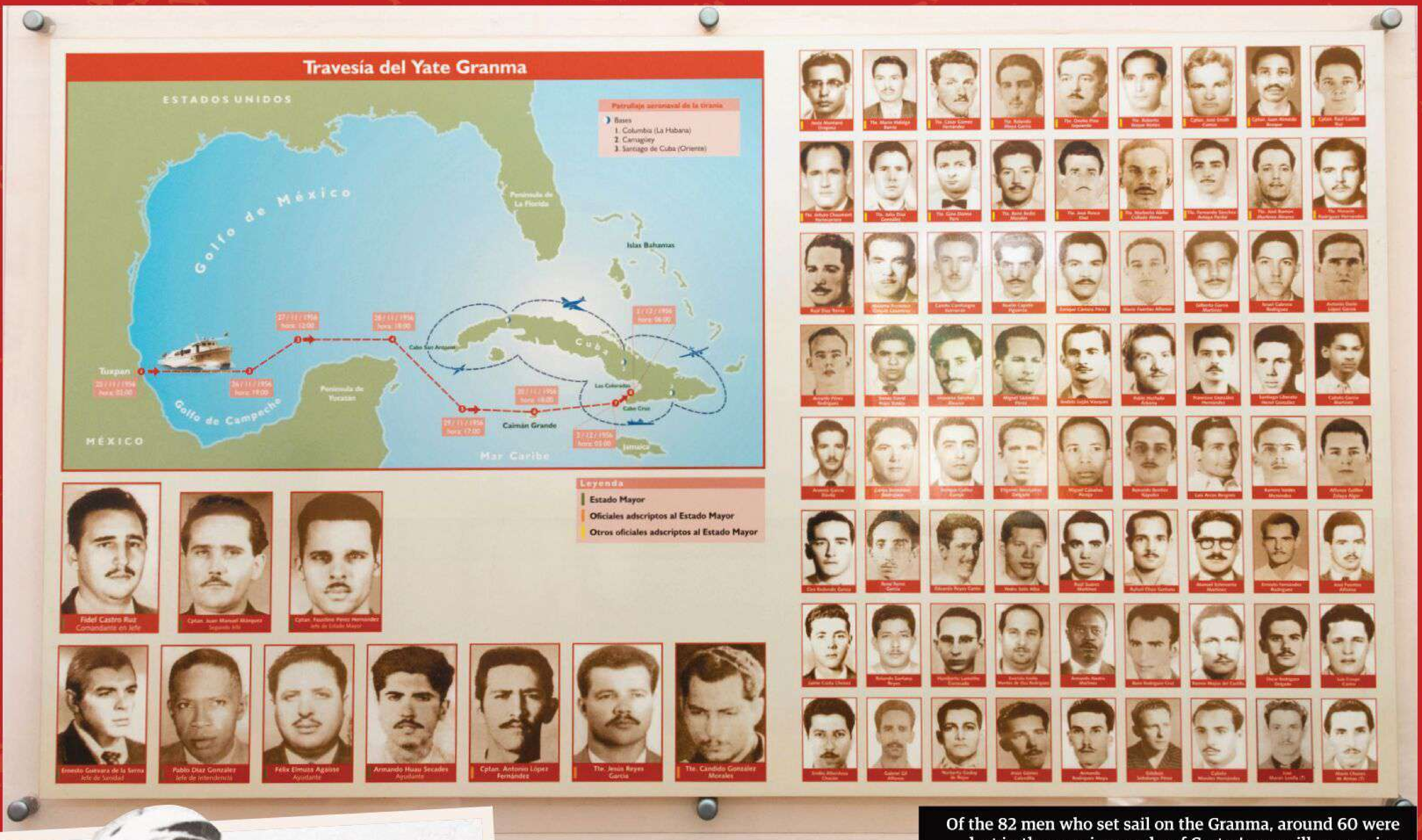
Cuban army troops are loaded into trucks to battle revolutionary forces in the Sierra Maestra mountains

Castro met many prominent figures, such as educator and fugitive political leader Dr Raúl Chibás, in his mountain hideouts


Travesía del Yate Granma
ESTADOS UNIDOS
Golfo de México
Golfo de Campeche
MÉXICO
Tuxpan
Mar Caribe
Islas Bahamas
Península de La Florida
Península de Yucatán
Caimán Grande
Cuba
Jamaica
Leyenda
Estado Mayor
Oficiales adscriptos al Estado Mayor
Otros oficiales adscriptos al Estado Mayor
Fidel Castro Ruz
Comandante en Jefe

Of the 82 men who set sail on the Granma, around 60 were lost in the opening weeks of Castro's guerrilla campaign

# THE CALAMITOUS LANDING OF THE GRANMA YACHT

## From an inauspicious voyage, a mighty revolution was born

Castro and his troops featuring on the CBS News Special Event 'Rebels of the Sierra Maestra', in 1957

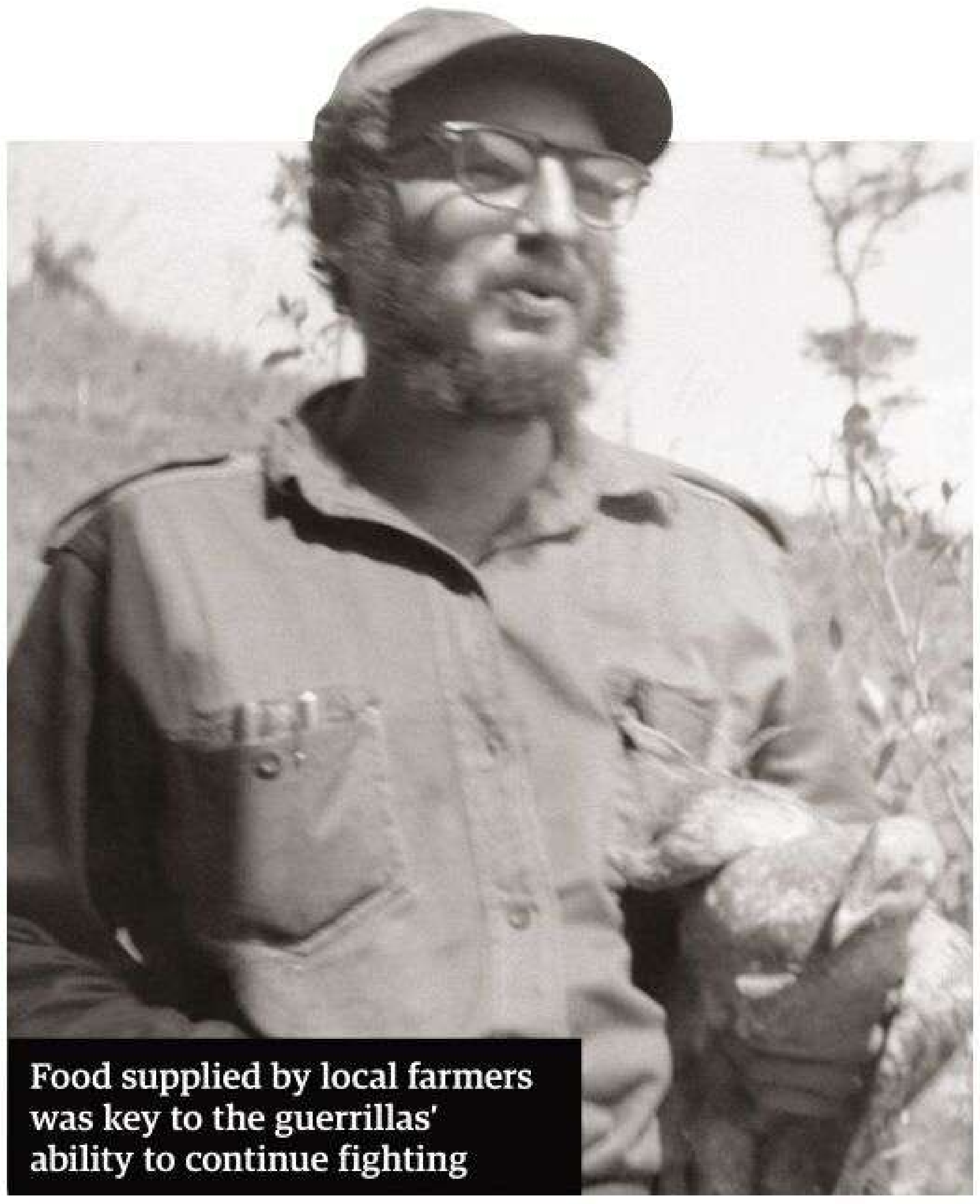
When the Granma pushed off from the river's edge at Tuxpan in Mexico, it carried 82 men, a stockpile of weapons and medicine, plus the dreams of Fidel Castro and his fledgling rebel army. The yacht, with Castro at the helm, slipped downriver and made its way into the Gulf of Mexico. It was on course to land at the Cabo Cruz lighthouse on the south-eastern coast of Cuba, but things did not go to plan.

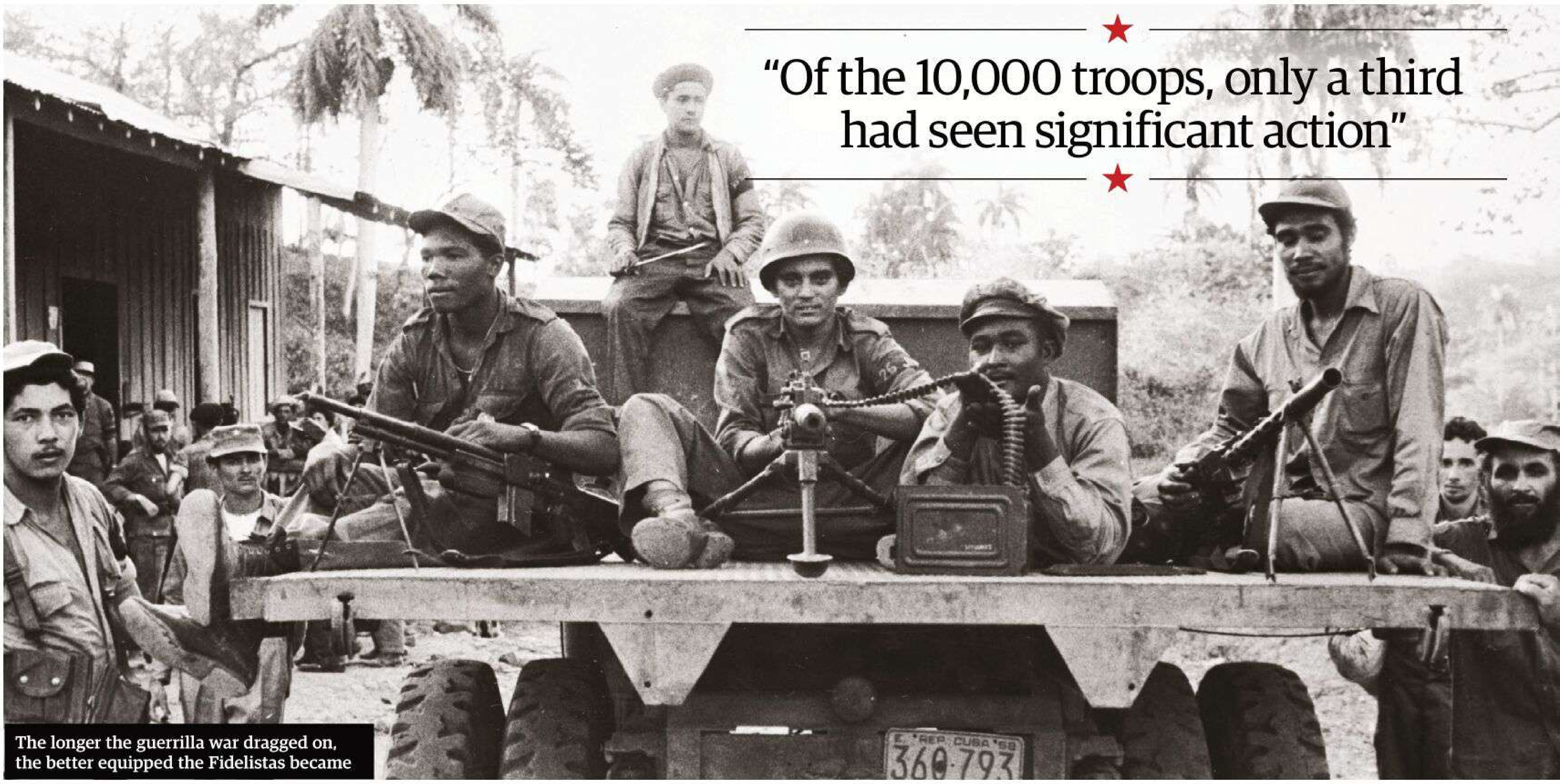
The weather was poor and the rebels suffered delay and sickness in the storm-tossed waters. They hoped to land on 30 November, when they would meet up with allies and launch an attack on the nearby towns of Niquero and then Manzanillo. At the same time, the 26th of July Movement would launch attacks in Santiago.

But the delay at sea saw Castro arrive two days late and the revolt in Santiago went ahead while the rebels were still at sea. When the boat finally did approach the Cuban shore, the navigator fell overboard and more precious time was lost. The yacht then hit a sandbank, forcing those onboard to abandon supplies and weapons as they struggled ashore, more than a mile south of their intended landing site.

They then hit a mangrove swamp and, by the time they reached the rendezvous, their welcome party had disappeared back into the mountains. Their arrival had not gone unnoticed by the authorities, however, and planes flew overhead strafing the forests. Castro's revolution had started with disaster.

A master of propaganda, Castro invited the world's media to see him planning his guerrilla raids


Food supplied by local farmers was key to the guerrillas' ability to continue fighting


The longer the guerrilla war dragged on, the better equipped the Fidelistas became

> "Of the 10,000 troops, only a third had seen significant action"

Cienfuegos being wounded twice in a bid to rescue an abandoned machine gun. The attack ran on and off for the entire day before the rebels returned to the hills with a clutch of captured weapons. One newspaper in Havana described the incursion as being led by "the international Communist agent known as Che Guevara".

In March, the US suspended arms shipments to Batista, though a planned nationwide strike by his political opponents, which was designed to bring Cuba to its knees, proved a washout with Castro, the communists, the 26th of July Movement and others all shifting the blame. Buoyed by its failure and a quietening of guerrilla activity in and around the Sierra Maestra, Batista began hatching plans for a final push against Castro's insurgents. By mid-April, Castro was digging in, setting up camp at La Otilia as he prepared for a full assault, his troops launching rockets at the enemy and skirmishing with army patrols. Castro used this time to write to military officers, hoping to persuade them to join his cause.

Towards the end of May, the army began making its move, with General Cantillo now in command. He had 14 battalions at his disposal as well as tanks and air support and he planned to encircle the rebels, gradually pushing in towards La Plata, where Castro had established his HQ. The coastal garrisons were reinforced and the navy was positioned nearby to provide artillery support and to prevent any escape by sea. For the Fidelistas, the outlook was bleak. Their only succour came from the inexperience of Cantillo's men – of the 10,000 troops that surrounded them, only around a third had seen significant action. On 25 May, the offensive began in earnest. Batista had launched Operation Verano.

Yet his troops did not fully understand the topography of the mountains and units were frequently cut off from one another as the ravines and mountains wreaked havoc with their communications. The rebels attacked and fell back, isolating small pockets of troops. What the rebels lacked in numbers they more than made up for with nous. Castro and Guevara split their forces, with Castro set to lead an assault on the army at Jigüe while Guevara defended the heartland around Mompié. Guevara's men were on the receiving end of a bombardment from the air, with planes dropping napalm as well as explosives.

As July unfolded, Castro struck what many consider the crucial blow at the Battle of Jigüe (also called the Battle of La Plata). Over the course of two days early in the month, he captured 19 men while also learning that the enemy commander, Major José Quevedo, was an old law school classmate. Castro wrote to him in a bid to win him over. He also used loudspeakers to barrage the soldiers with anti-Batista propaganda. Castro was nothing if not resourceful.

As the siege dragged on, with the Cuban military dug in, Castro demonstrated his innovative thinking once more, setting one of his men to masquerade as an army radio operator who sent a message to the air force claiming that the rebels had taken the camp. The air force responded by bombing their own men's position, sending the soldiers into a state of panic. By 18 July, Castro had 49 prisoners and a huge cache of captured arms. On the evening of 20 July, the siege finally broke and Quevedo surrendered. On the very same day, the radio carried news of the Pact of Caracas, which brought together eight different opposition groups – Castro has signed previously on behalf of the 26th of July Movement – that were all committed to the overthrow of Batista.

But the Cuban army was not yet done. On 28 July, they retreated from the area around Santo Domingo and the rebels, thinking themselves victorious, gave chase. The army commander, Sánchez Mosquera, a long-time thorn in Castro's side, was a wily fox and he circled back, taking the hilltop of Arroyones near Las Mercedes and outflanked his pursuers. Two rebel captains were killed; René Ramos Latour, with whom Castro had much history, succumbed to a mortar wound. The fighting was fierce and no side could press home a notable advantage. On 8 August, the army began to withdraw. This signalled the end of Batista's bid to destroy Castro in his mountain home. Operation Verano had failed.

> During the battle at Las Mercedes, Che Guevara captured an army tank, which became the focus of a hotly contested gunfight

"Batista's army came out of that last offensive in the Sierra Maestra with its spine broken," wrote Guevara, "but it had not yet been defeated. The struggle would go on." The aerial bombardment continued, and the rebels had not yet won their decisive victory. Still, Castro's guerrilla war in the Sierra Maestra, though born in adversity, would end in triumph. The stage was set. The Batista regime was entering its last days.

# GUERRILLA WARFARE & THE CUBAN CONFLICT

## Though he did not plan a lengthy guerrilla campaign, Castro proved an adept acolyte of this very specific type of warfare

Guerrilla warfare finds its etymological origin in the diminutive of Spanish word 'guerra', meaning 'war', and is said to have worked its way into the English language during the Duke of Wellington's campaigns in the Peninsular War of 1807-14, in which Spanish and Portuguese irregulars, or guerrilleros, fought the French on the Iberian Peninsula. It has gone on to define a method of warfare executed most often by irregular troops who are fast-moving and working in small groups against more established, larger enemy forces. This type of 'small war' has frustrated many orthodox armies across the years – Tito's communist Partisans famously tied down the German army in what was then Yugoslavia during World War II, while in 1937, the communist leader Mao Zedong published the famous tract, *On Guerrilla Warfare*.

In Cuba, Castro had hoped for a swift, lightning-fast attack on Batista's regime and was forced into a guerrilla war when his landing went awry and he was chased into the mountains of the Sierra Maestra. And yet, for almost two years he waged war in the hills and proved a constant thorn in his enemy's side, eventually winning an unlikely victory against a much stronger foe. It was during this conflict that Che Guevara cut his teeth as a guerrilla fighter. After helping Castro topple Batista's regime, he went on to organise guerrilla forces in the Congo, and then in Bolivia, where he finally lost his life, fighting to the bitter end.

The Sierra Maestra proved fertile territory for Castro's guerrilla war

© Getty Images

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“Men held all the power while the women struggled to keep their families together”

★

Celia Sánchez accompanies her leader and friend, Fidel Castro, as they greet the M-26-7 after victory over Batista

# WOMEN AND THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

The massive uprising of the working-class menfolk may have led to a celebrated revolution but the significance of the fighting women of Cuba cannot be overlooked or underplayed

Written by
**JOANNA ELPHICK**

Think of the Cuban Revolution and two distinct images immediately spring to mind; Che Guevara, beret perched atop his thick black curls, staring defiantly into the middle distance, and Fidel Castro, with his unruly hair, untamed beard and cigar clamped between his teeth. A clearer picture of machismo in action would be hard to find and yet, somewhere, hidden behind the male posturing, lies the inspirational tale of a group of young women who not only fought for their country, but also for the future of their sex.

## THE REVOLUTION WITHIN THE REVOLUTION

There were two revolutions taking place in Cuba between 26 July 1953 and 1 January 1959. The first, that of the overthrow of the government of Fulgencio Batista, has been heavily documented. The second, though less reported, is every bit as significant and involves a series of brave, charismatic women and their fight for equality in the home, the street and in the workplace.

Throughout history, Cuban women had been pigeon-holed into specific gender-related roles. They were first and foremost wives and mothers, destined to support their husbands by maintaining the family home, preparing meals and looking after the children. Such domestic tasks required love and dedication to keep the home fires burning. Traditional home-making skills were passed down from mother to daughter and the importance of a formal education was therefore superfluous to requirements. Reading was a skill that they simply did not need.

In 1953, one in five women could neither read nor write, while only one in 100 women over the age of 25 had gained a university-based education. Such marginalisation precluded them from achieving any influential positions of power or even autonomy over their own destiny.

Abortion was illegal and contraceptives impossible to acquire. Once again, control over the female body rested with the men. A pregnant woman was tied to the homestead where 80 per cent of all babies were born. Only 20 per cent of Cuban females gave birth under the watchful eye of a doctor in the comparative safety of a hospital. Having children was not only an inevitable consequence of being married, it was also a highly dangerous one.

Most peasant women stayed at home, caring for the family and farming the land to supplement the

> Pre-revolution, Mariana Grajales, who surrendered her sons to die fighting for independence, became the symbol for Cuban women; the self-sacrificing mother

meagre income earned by the man of the household. At that time, the majority of the land itself was owned by various US corporations that exploited desperate women for a pittance. Only 12 per cent of women were employed outside the home and of that percentage, 70 per cent worked in the domestic service for the wealthy. Due to their exclusion from the educational opportunities of their male counterparts and resulting illiteracy rates, such women ended up working for extraordinarily long hours as basic maids and cleaners with low pay, no respect and few, if any, benefits. Having completed a gruelling shift, they were expected to return home to their own domestic chores. Childcare was non-existent, leaving the females to create their own internal support network.

Of course, prostitution was always an option for a financially distressed woman in need of extra cash for her family, but such a choice was fraught with danger, often resulting in physical injury or yet another unwanted pregnancy. Unsavoury an option though it undoubtedly was, opportunities were plentiful, particularly since the neo-colonial Cuban government encouraged such a 'career path'. The American Mafia owned all casinos, the majority of the hotels and ran the sex industry that had settled in Havana. The need for prostitutes was high and the women were desperate.

Men held all the power and made all the decisions while the women, struggling to keep their families together, living in appalling conditions and forced to work themselves into exhaustion, did not even control their own bodies. The poor were ripe for revolution and, although the men were first to take up arms, the women, with their own personal agenda, would soon follow. Enough was enough.

## WOMEN OF THE LLANO

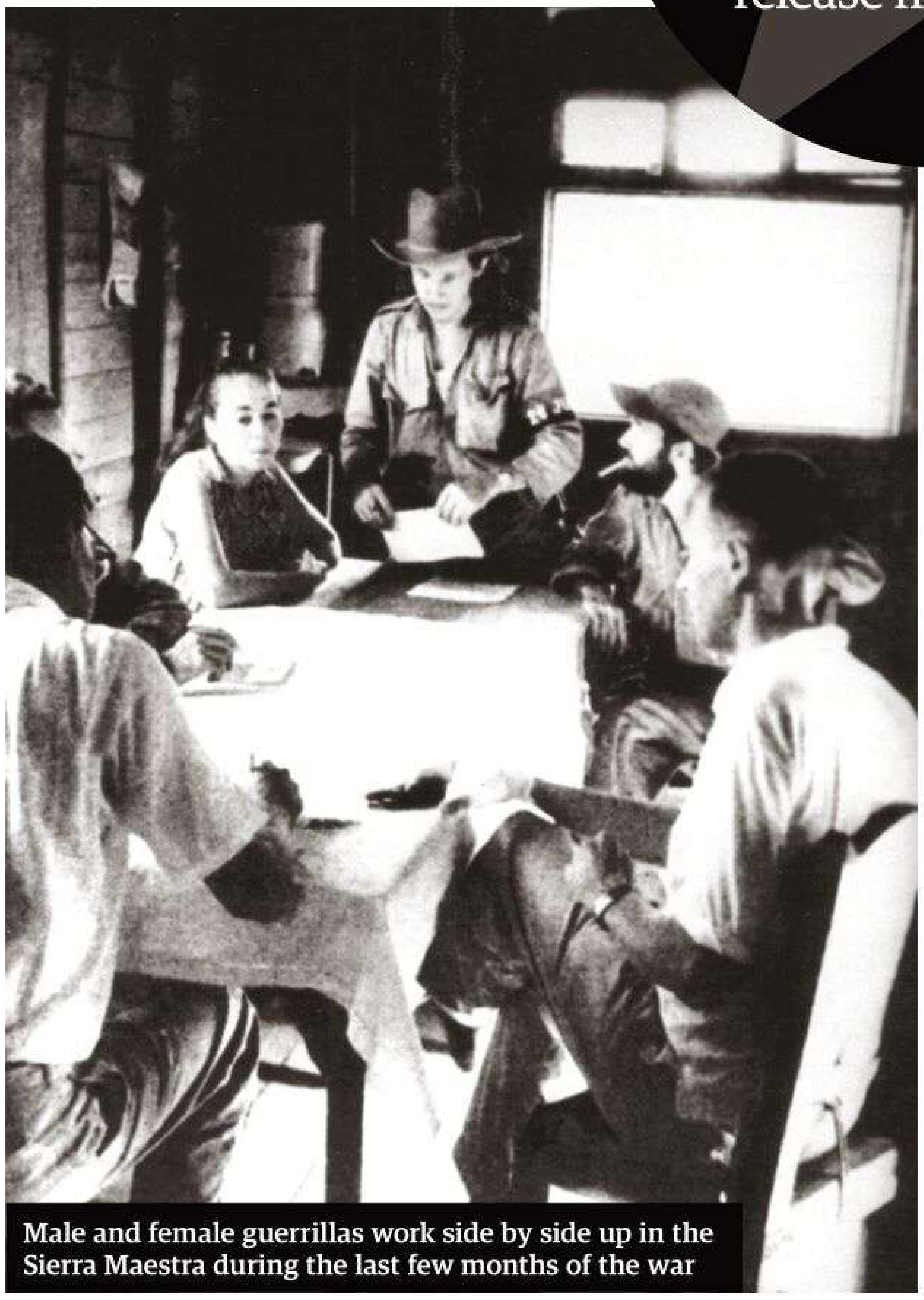
Over the years, there has been some mention of the female Cuban rebel soldiers, the angry and frustrated guerrillas, but before them another group of brave women, working in the llano, were actively supporting Castro and paving the way for a successful revolution. Clearly then, the Cuban women's rebel narrative stems from two distinct locations; the Sierra or mountains, where the females took up arms and fought alongside the men, and the secret underground movement in the llano, or plains, possibly less violent but undeniably as significant and dangerous in its own way.

While Guevara focused on a physical war, Castro recognised the importance of reaching the minds of the people emotionally if they were to be successful. Women could, and of course did, fight but their gender could also be harnessed as a tactical weapon in itself. They could walk through the urban streets in plain sight, whipping up support on the ground, undetected by the enemy who disregarded them out of hand. Thirty per cent of these women were at least middle-aged, some even older, and were therefore an apparently unthreatening force. Yet these maternal figures were passing information and appealing to the citizens living on the streets. Younger women, who would ultimately head for the mountains to fight, began their involvement giggling and flirting with the guards, distracting them with their feminine wiles, while others, pretending to be heavily pregnant, waddled past carrying guns and information within their fake stomachs.

Castro appointed a woman, María Antonia Figueroa, as M-26-7 treasurer, a vitally important role, on his release from prison

Their sex became an integral part of Castro's arsenal as they worked the town squares and shadowy lanes of Cuba. Uniforms and flags were deftly stitched and smuggled out while vital information was transported around the island. Women made excellent spies, particularly in a country where their gender was entirely disregarded and overlooked. They sold war bonds and undertook propaganda missions, some even heading sabotage units in the heart of the cities.

The assault on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba was an unmitigated disaster for Castro and his rebel army but the humiliating defeat was fashioned into a success story thanks to the participation of two women. Melba Hernández and Haydée Santamaría slipped unnoticed across the country, carrying guns in suitcases and florist boxes. At their secret base, they ironed uniforms and prepared hot meals but, when it was time to take up arms, Castro expected them to wait behind where it was safe. The women insisted on full participation until, eventually, Castro relented, sending them to a supposedly safe destination, the civilian hospital, to attend to the wounded as they


Male and female guerrillas work side by side up in the Sierra Maestra during the last few months of the war

Fidel Castro and Celia Sánchez pose with the army rebels in the Sierra Maestra in 1957

arrived. Ironically, this was to be a highly dangerous mission since the hospital was quickly overrun and at least 17 rebels stationed there were killed within hours. Hernández and Santamaría were given ample opportunities to escape but chose instead to stand alongside the men, loading their rifles and tending to injuries. Unlike the others who were taken out and shot, the women were taken into custody and, on their release, as survivors to the slaughter, they told of their terrifying experiences and the treatment of their comrades. Their words gave emotional weight to the rebel propaganda and they soon became inspirational figures in the fight against Batista's regime. Further support was offered to the surviving captives through morale-boosting exercises. Celia and Griselda Sánchez smuggled uplifting messages of hope on scraps of paper hidden inside cigarettes and delivered them to the prisoners via the unwitting guards who appreciated the flirtatious attentions of two attractive women. In this way, the embarrassing defeat became a patriotic propaganda success, instigating recruits and furthering rebel support so desperately needed for an effective revolution.

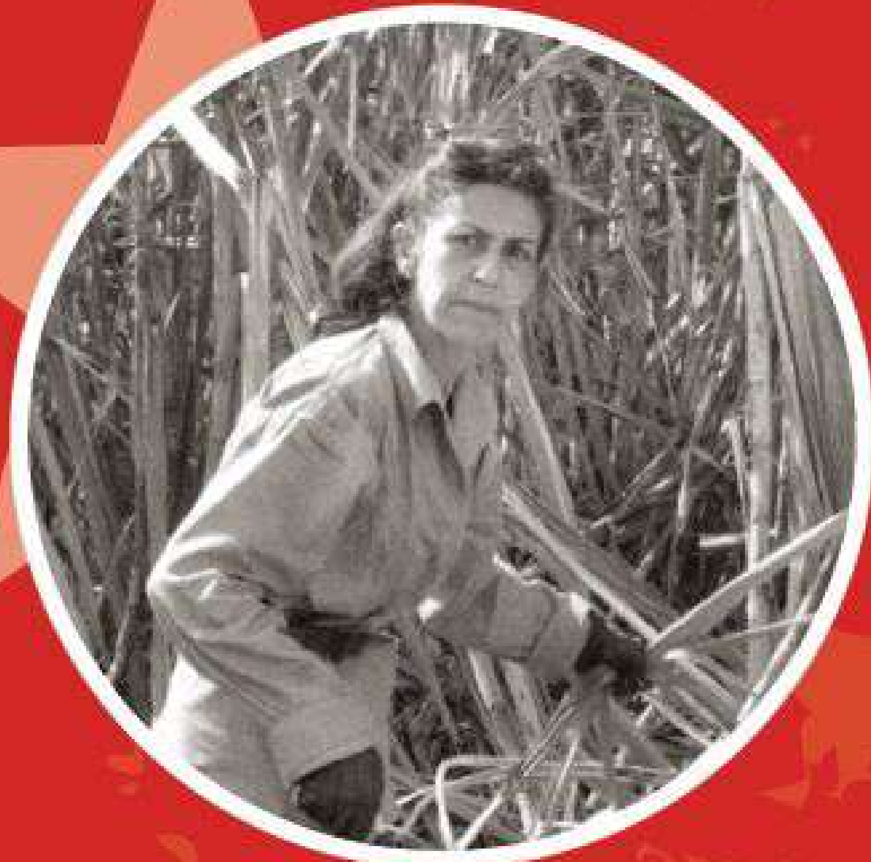
Celia Sánchez quickly became an ardent supporter of both Castro and his revolutionary ideals, having personally suffered at the hands of Batista's regime. Sánchez had previously taken in an orphan child by the name of María Ochoa and raised her as her own. When the ten year old went missing, Celia tracked her down to a Mafia-owned casino. Her lifeless body had been discarded on the floor after she had been repeatedly raped by an American paedophile. Castro realised that her hatred and passion could be harnessed and Sánchez became a loyal and compassionate member of his inner circle, known by the mountain rebels as the 'flower of the Sierra'.

As the 26th of July Movement gained momentum, Castro convinced his men of the great importance of female participation and although they were initially given 'soft duties', it wasn't long before they were offered positions of authority and trust. Batista's men were reluctant to torture and kill women, giving Castro a much-needed advantage. While his male soldiers were captured or gunned down where they stood, his female combatants could continue to work in carrying the movement forward. Guevara was in complete agreement, claiming that women were capable of doing almost every task that a man could do. He acknowledged their particular usefulness within the world of espionage due to 'perceptions of female fragility', but also because they could cook and care for the warring revolutionaries. It would appear that, even during such desperate times, women could not escape their domestic roles but this was a small price to pay for their ultimate freedom and the goal of gender equality.

> Teachers were the third largest occupational category of women combatants, having been radicalised by their teenage students' politics and various teachers' organisations

## FEMALE STARS OF CUBA'S REVOLUTION

Many brave women fought alongside the men but a handful of awe-inspiring females will go down in history

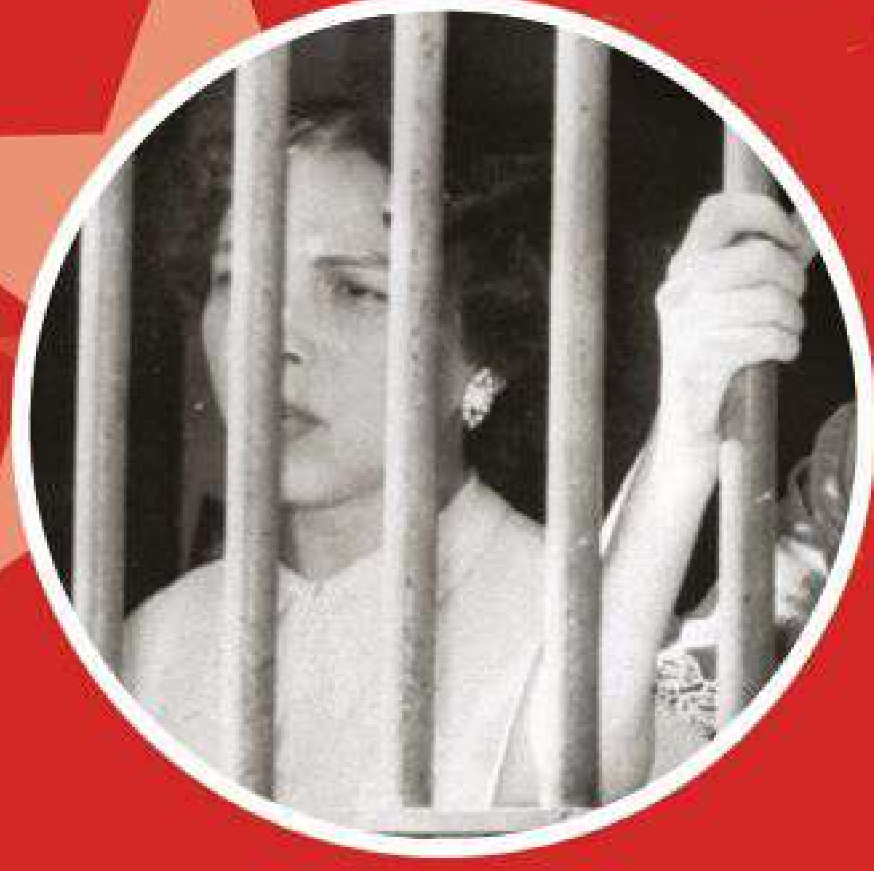


### CELIA SÁNCHEZ

Born in 1920, Sánchez joined M-26-7 in 1953 and quickly became one of Castro's closest confidants at the heart of the revolution. By 1957, she was the country's most wanted woman and so joined Castro up in the Sierra Maestra where she signed up with the Mariana Grajales Platoon, fighting alongside the men.

### VILMA ESPÍN

Known as 'Cuba's First Lady', Vilma was an educated woman from a prosperous family who used her connections to convince the CIA that Castro and Guevara had no ties to communism, thereby keeping the US out of the war. Post-revolution, she became the founding president of the FCW, fighting for women's rights.



### HAYDÉE SANTAMARÍA

Haydée was the only woman to participate in every phase of the revolution, from the battle at Moncada, the M-26-7, and eventually fighting with the Mariana Grajales Platoon. After the war she founded and ran the Casa de las Americas, a cultural and arts institution, extending relations with the rest of the world.

### MELBA HERNÁNDEZ

Having fought in the battle on Moncada Barracks, Melba went on to become a key player in Castro's propaganda mission, publishing and distributing his 'History Will Absolve Me' speech. She followed him into the Sierra and supported the formation of the guerrilla army, earning the nickname 'Heroine of the Cuban Revolution'.

### TETÉ PUEBLA

Born in 1940, Teté became second-in-command of the Marianas, working closely with Celia Sánchez. After the war she was appointed as the director of the Department for the Care of War Victims, served in both governmental and military roles, before becoming brigadier general, the first woman to do so in Cuban history.

## CUBAN WOMEN TODAY

### They fought bravely for their country and their own personal independence, but did they get all they were hoping for?

There is no doubt that the lives of Cuban women today are infinitely better than those living before the revolution. Thanks to the tireless work of Vilma Espín and so many others within the Federation of Cuban Women, young girls are offered educational opportunities that their mothers would never have dared even dream of. However, despite Castro's genuine desire to produce gender equality through the introduction of the Código de la Familia, it turns out that the cultural machismo ingrained within the fabric of Cuba's heritage has been impossible to fully eradicate. Yes, women can now make independent choices regarding their future. They can educate themselves, climb the corporate ladder as high as their male counterparts and, after waiting far too long, take ownership of their bodies, but they are still females and, as such, are inevitably tied to the home. While integration into the workforce has been successful, the notion that men should take on the domestic burden has not been a theory that has been accepted. Females are free to gain employment but they must be prepared to come home and undertake 'sobrecargo', or second shift, dealing with food preparation, cleaning and childcare issues. Women wishing to work must seriously consider whether they can achieve their goals and complete most, if not all, domestic chores and family commitments. As a result, Cuba's birth rate has been decreasing. By utilising the new-found control over their own bodies, they are consciously deciding to forgo motherhood in order to fulfil their career plans. It seems that, until this area of inequality has been dealt with, women in Cuba will not be able to have both.

Today, women celebrate the brave work of the female revolutionaries during the May Day festivities in Revolution Square, Havana

As time went on, female participation escalated. Elena Ricardo created and planted bombs on the Jobabito River, while Gena Moreno smuggled dynamite under her clothing. Celia Sánchez became the vital link between the Sierra rebels and those working in the llano.

### THE MARIANA GRAJALES PLATOON

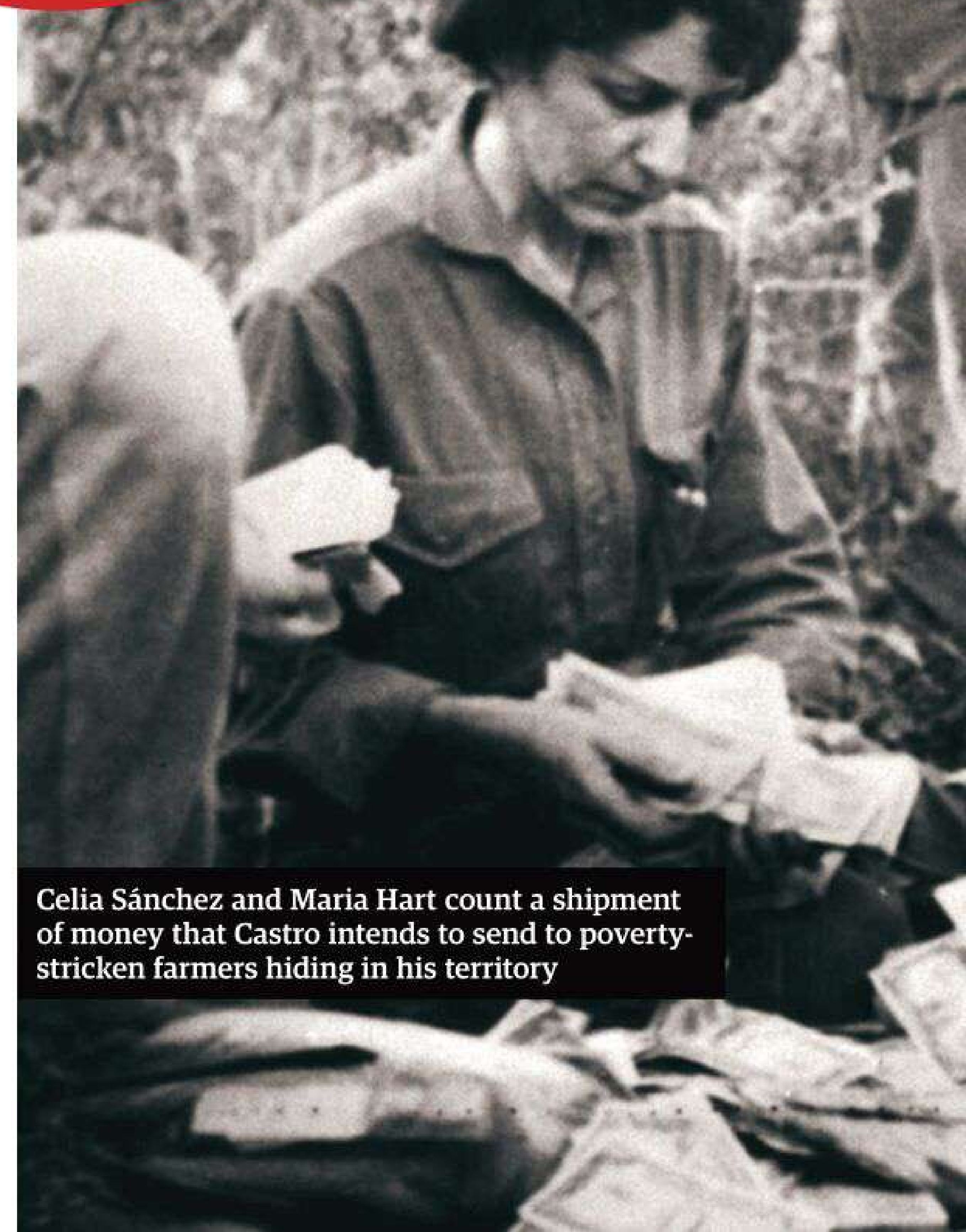
As the revolution progressed, many younger, often single, women chose to abandon the urban plains and join the rebels living in the Sierra, following in the footsteps of the highly respected Celia Sánchez who had permanently transferred to the mountains in 1957. It was here, on 4 September 1958, that the Mariana Grajales Women's Platoon was formed. It took Castro approximately seven hours to convince the male rebels that the women should be given rifles, particularly since there were so few guns to go around, but eventually the idea was accepted and training began. Castro himself taught the women to shoot, not allowing them to go out on a mission until they could hit a 20 centavo coin from 30 metres (98 feet) away. The final crack-shot team became his personal security detail, displaying his confidence in an all-female squad.

On 27 September, the Marianas faced their first battle at Cerro Pelado, killing five of the enemy and wounding 62 more, without a single casualty of their own. Further successful battles followed, including Los Guiros, Velasco Law Unas and La Presa de Holguín, proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that the women were every bit as brave and fierce as their male counterparts. By late 1958, five per cent of the Sierra rebels were women but very few were actual fighters in its truest sense. Most continued to undertake domesticated roles as before while a mere 14 females took up arms. However, these women represented far more than a handful of extra rifle-bearers. They were symbols of the extraordinary ideological change for women that Castro was prepared to uphold in a post-war revolutionary government. They were also part of a vital tactic; shaming the emasculated enemy who ran from women with guns. In this way, the fighting females of the Sierra contributed to the revolution as propaganda heroines.

On 30 December 1958, the capital of Santa Clara gave way to the rebels and by 1 January, it was all over. Batista's men fled, leaving the M-26-7 to take control. The Mariana Grajales women were lauded by their leader but by the end of January they had been dissolved. Almost straightaway, these battling women returned to their more traditional roles with Vilma Espín, Haydée Santamaría and Aleida March all falling pregnant within a matter of months. By 1960, Espín called for women to join the National Revolutionary Militia, claiming that they still had much to fight for.

The new post-revolutionary government demolished all capitalist state institutions and began to rebuild Cuba. Over half of the people were illiterate and most of these Cubans were women. One of the

Female rebels sewed bags on elasticated belts or pockets inside their skirts that they called 'enganadoras' or deceivers, in order to carry bullets across town



Celia Sánchez and Maria Hart count a shipment of money that Castro intends to send to poverty-stricken farmers hiding in his territory first initiatives was therefore to tackle the problem of widespread illiteracy and help women into an accommodating workforce. The literary brigade or 'brigadistas' consisting of girls between the ages of ten and 18, travelled across the countryside, teaching the people to read and write. Once again, the women of Cuba were proving their worth in a macho society. Any discrimination within the school curriculum was quickly removed. All children were taught the same skills ranging from home economics to woodwork, irrespective of gender-based expectations. With their improved educational system, female employment increased dramatically, allowing them to contribute to the economic development of their beloved country.

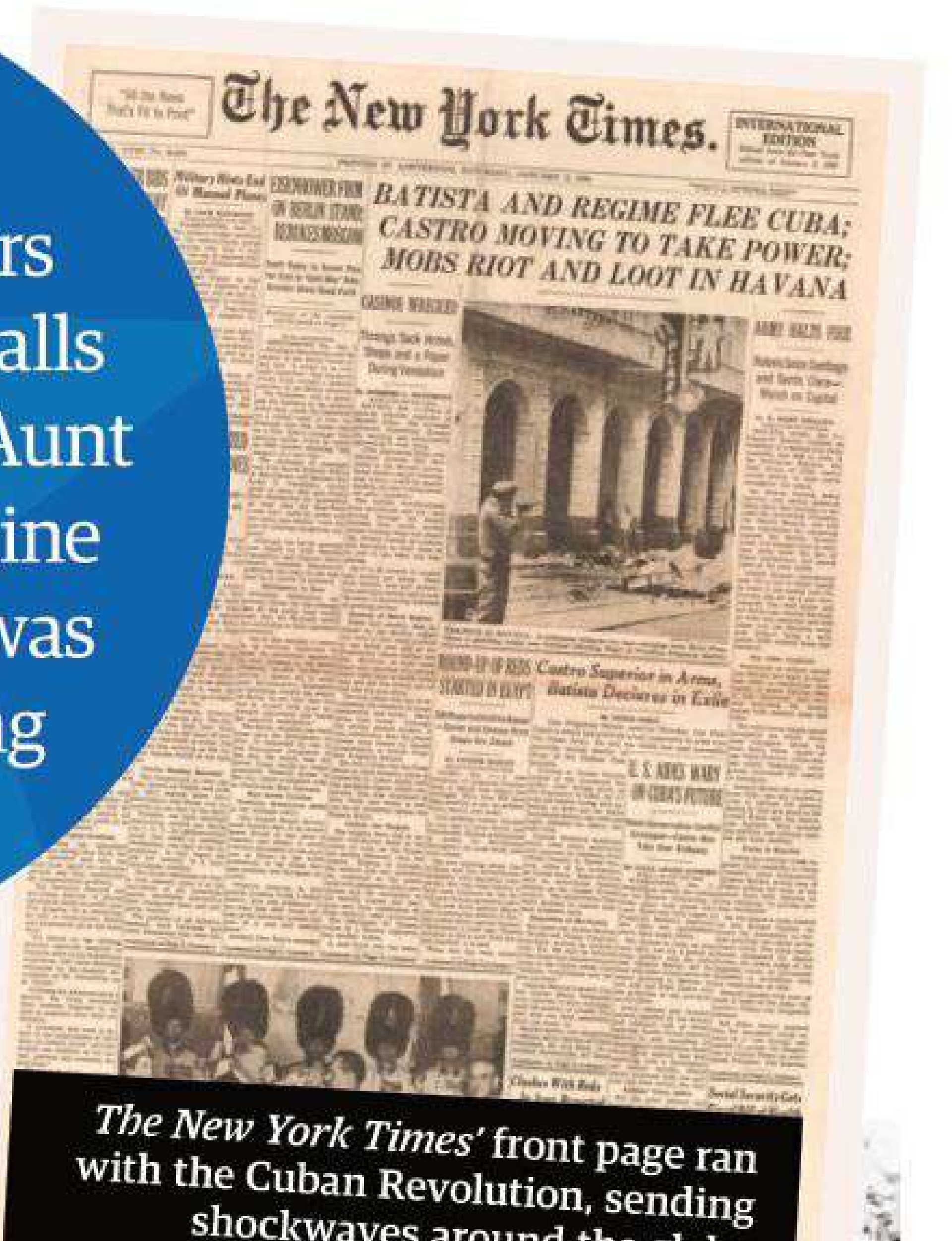
In 1960, the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) was formed to deal with issues of gender equality and, most importantly, to protect and maintain the rights and freedoms of women. It was headed by revolutionary superstar Vilma Espín until her death in 2007. Various key issues were addressed by the federation, including the establishment of infant day-care centres and paid maternity leave, which gave women the opportunity to fulfil their domestic roles, embrace motherhood, while also having the support to pursue their own, independent career paths.

Under the watchful eye of Espín, prostitution was greatly reduced while female healthcare became widely accessible. Abortion was finally decriminalised in 1965 and, by 1979, the procedure was made free and available to all women. Contraceptives were widely offered through the Cuban healthcare system, finally giving females rightful autonomy over their own bodies. Castro continued to marvel at his female inner circle, claiming, "this phenomenon of women's participation in the revolution was a revolution within the revolution".

However, Castro was aware that more needed to be done to improve the balance between home life and working life, known in Cuba as the Casa (home) Calle (street) Issue. As a result, the Código de la Familia, or Family Code, was implemented in 1975, in order to address the unequal participation of domestic tasks within the family unit.

Just as British women proved their worth during World War I, supporting the troops, tending to the wounded and ensuring that the farms and factories continued to run, so too did the women of Cuba, whether they sewed uniforms, undertook spy missions or carried rifles into battle. As Che Guevara once wrote, "the part that a woman can play in the development of a revolutionary process is of extraordinary importance". How right he was.

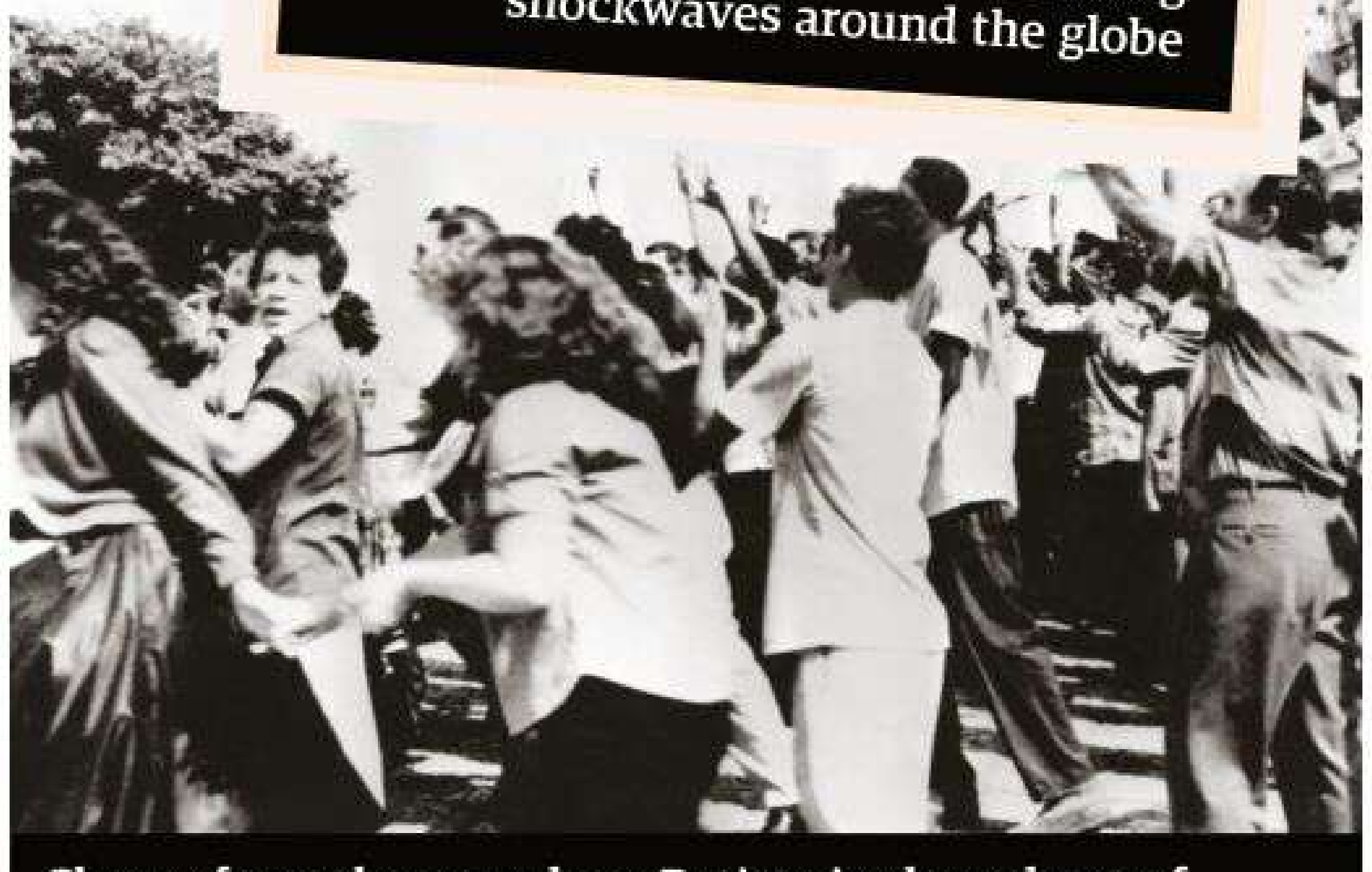
Female telephone operators made untraceable calls using passwords. If 'Aunt Dora' was well, the line was free but if she was poorly, it was being monitored


The New York Times.

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

BATISTA AND REGIME FLEE CUBA; CASTRO MOVING TO TAKE POWER; MOBS RIOT AND LOOT IN HAVANA

*The New York Times'* front page ran with the Cuban Revolution, sending shockwaves around the globe


Cheers from the crowds as Batista is chased out of the country on 1 January 1959. Meanwhile, Castro is greeted with wild shouting and applause

The Mariana Grajales Women's Platoon, proudly displaying their rifles, pose with reporter, Victor M Mangual, and a number of the Sierra rebels

Vilma Espín and Melba Hernández, lifelong friends as well as co-revolutionaries, celebrate the anniversary of the attack on the Moncada Barracks

© Getty Images; Alamy; TopFoto

# REBELS TRIUMPHANT: THE FINAL VICTORY

A series of stunning victories against government forces compelled dictator Fulgencio Batista to flee Cuba ahead of Fidel Castro's rebel army

Written by
**MIKE HASKEW**

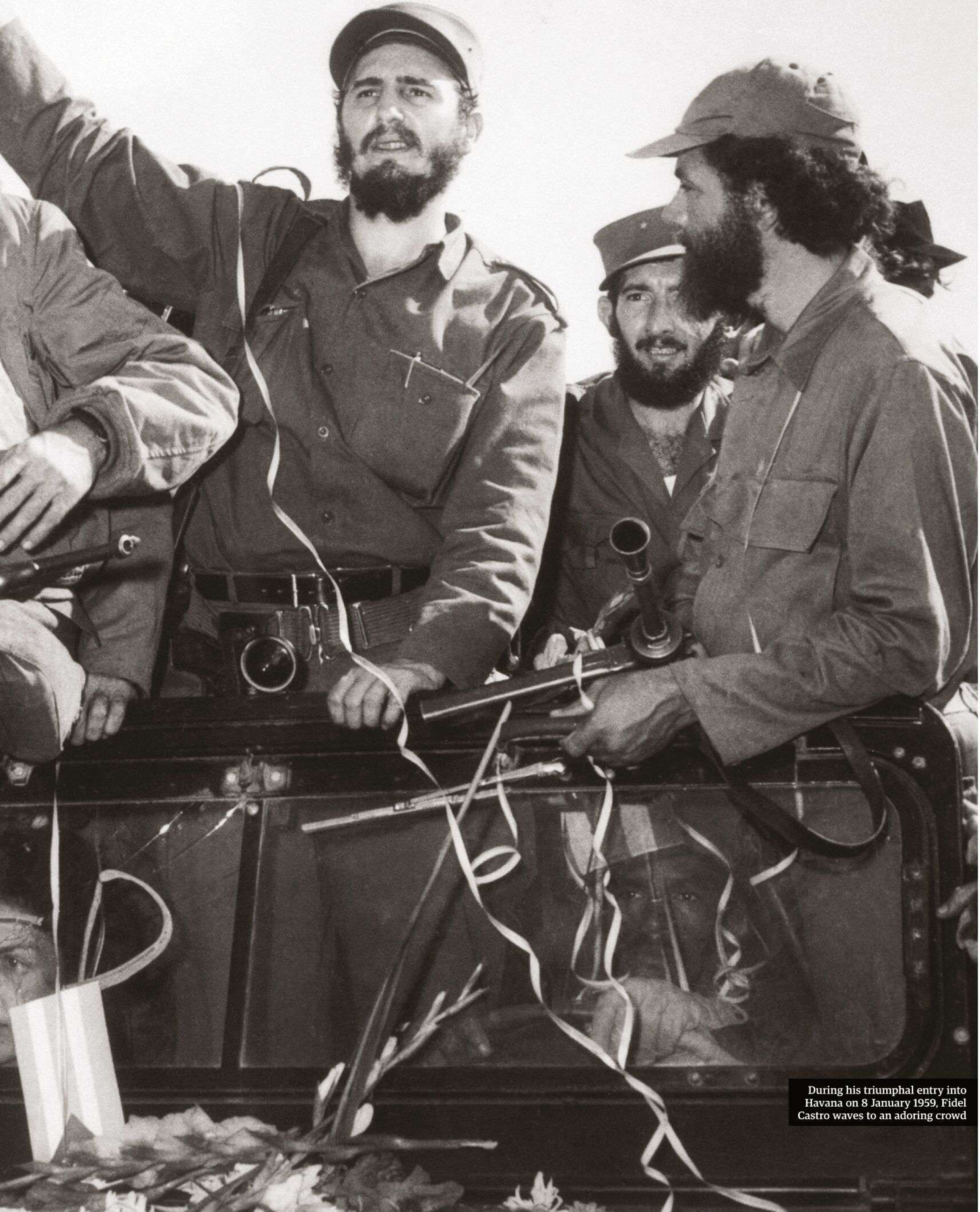
The failure of Operation Verano proved to be the turning point in the revolution that toppled repressive dictator Fulgencio Batista from power in Cuba. Intended to quell the uprising led by leftist revolutionary Fidel Castro once and for all, Verano instead laid bare the hollow commitment of the Cuban Army's rank and file to the preservation of the corrupt government that had ruled the island nation since the spring of 1952.

Sensing an opportunity with this decisive reversal of fortune, Castro and his close ideological and military confidantes – Che Guevara, brother Raúl Castro and Juan Almeida Bosque – mounted a counter-offensive that stunned the world when final victory was achieved four months later. Several factors contributed to the decision to press their offensive home in the autumn of 1958, including their stalwart revolutionary zeal, a flood of new weapons – both appropriated from the army after the failed Operation Verano and smuggled into the country by plane – and cooperation with other revolutionary splinter groups.

Perhaps more helpful to the revolutionary cause than anything else was the simple fact that many soldiers appeared willing to lay down their arms rather than die for Batista. Guevara rightly assessed the psyche of the government soldier as the final revolutionary push began to take shape. "The enemy soldier in the Cuban example which at present concerns us is the junior partner of the dictator," he observed. "He is the man who gets the last crumb left by a long line of profiteers that begins in Wall Street and ends with him. He is disposed to defend his privileges, but he is disposed to defend them only to the degree that they are important to him. His salary and his pension are worth some suffering and some dangers, but they are never worth his life. If the price of maintaining them will cost it, he is better off giving them up; that is to say, withdrawing from the face of the guerrilla danger."

Convinced that the loyalty of the common soldier to Batista was in decline, the revolutionaries, though small in number, seized the military initiative on 21 August 1958, and never relinquished it. Coming down from the mountains of the Sierra Maestra in the south of Cuba, the rebels attacked Batista's forces on four

The United States initially recognised Castro's government in Cuba but withdrew its support in the coming months



During his triumphal entry into Havana on 8 January 1959, Fidel Castro waves to an adoring crowd separate fronts. Initial progress was swift as the civilian population supported the rebels and their ranks were augmented with the addition of new fighters. Castro won several small victories, further bolstering the morale of his soldiers.

During ten days of fighting that was often intense, the rebels won a significant victory in the Battle of Guisa in November. Castro addressed a wide audience on the rebel army radio network in early December. He harangued his audience with a heroic recounting of the struggle.

"All of the enemy forces from Bayamo, Manzanillo, Yara, Estrada Palma and Baire were mobilised to smash us," Castro crowed. "The column that advanced along the road from Corojo was repulsed after two hours of combat. The advance of the battalions that came along the road from Bayamo to Guisa was halted, and they encamped two kilometres from Guisa; those that advanced along the road from Corralillo were also turned back. The battalions that encamped two kilometres from Guisa tried to advance during the entire day of the 30th; at 4pm, while our forces were fighting them, the Guisa garrison abandoned the town in hasty flight, leaving behind abundant arms and armaments. At 9pm, our vanguard entered the town of Guisa. Enemy supplies seized included a T-17 tank - captured, lost, and recaptured; 94 weapons; 12 60mm mortars; one 91mm mortar; a bazooka; seven 30-calibre tripod machine guns; 50,000 bullets; 130 Garand grenades; 70 howitzers; 60 and 8mm mortars; 20 bazooka rockets; 200 knapsacks; 160 uniforms; 14 transport trucks; food; and medicine… Guisa, 12 kilometres from the military port of Bayamo, is now free Cuban territory."

With the victory at Guisa, Castro controlled several towns in the south, along with the Cauto plains. At the same time, three columns under Castro's lieutenants - Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos and Jaime Vega - moved north and west, aiming for the town of Santa Clara, the capital of Villa Clara Province. Government troops laid ambushes and hit Vega's column repeatedly, while the Cuban Air Force strafed the rebels, inflicting heavy casualties. Vega, who according to some sources was fighting with Castro but not necessarily politically aligned with him, fought back, but his column was destroyed.

"Initial progress was swift as the civilian population supported the rebels"

Dozens of people were arrested, tried and executed by firing squad after being found guilty of atrocities during Batista's rule

Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos celebrate amid the tumult in Havana after winning the Cuban Revolution

## A YOUTHFUL NATIONAL HERO

### At 26 years of age, Camilo Cienfuegos became a Cuban Revolution hero during his victory at the Battle of Yaguajay

Camilo Cienfuegos (right) alongside Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, as he addresses the citizens of Havana

The fighting was fierce at Yaguajay, and the siege of the town lasted 11 days. Despite his growing frustration that the victory was painfully slow, Camilo Cienfuegos, a dedicated follower of Marxist revolutionary Fidel Castro, was hailed a hero for his persistence - and for his passion.

Cienfuegos was an early champion of the rebel cause in Cuba, the son of a Spanish immigrant father who owned a tailor shop in Havana, and a member of the small band of fighters that accompanied Castro during his return to Cuba aboard the yacht Granma in 1956. Handsome, gregarious and a lover of baseball, Cienfuegos was a ferocious combatant, known for carrying a Thompson submachine gun. Still, he eschewed the penchant for violence and reprisal that other revolutionary leaders exhibited. At times, he told prisoners not to fear for their lives. Executing captives, he reasoned, would indeed make Cienfuegos no better than the hated Batista whom he was seeking to overthrow.

When Castro entered Havana in triumph on 8 January 1959, Cienfuegos was by his side as the revolutionary leader addressed the multitude of Cubans that had turned out to celebrate the demise of the Batista regime. While speaking, Castro paused and turned to his trusted lieutenant, asking, "Am I doing all right, Camilo?" Cienfuegos smiled broadly and replied, "You're doing fine, Fidel!" The response became famous and was used as a revolutionary slogan.

Cienfuegos' life was cut short on 28 October 1959, when his plane disappeared above the Straits of Florida during a nocturnal flight as he was returning to Havana from a mission in Camagüey.

# Rebels triumphant: The final victory

26
INTERAMERICANA

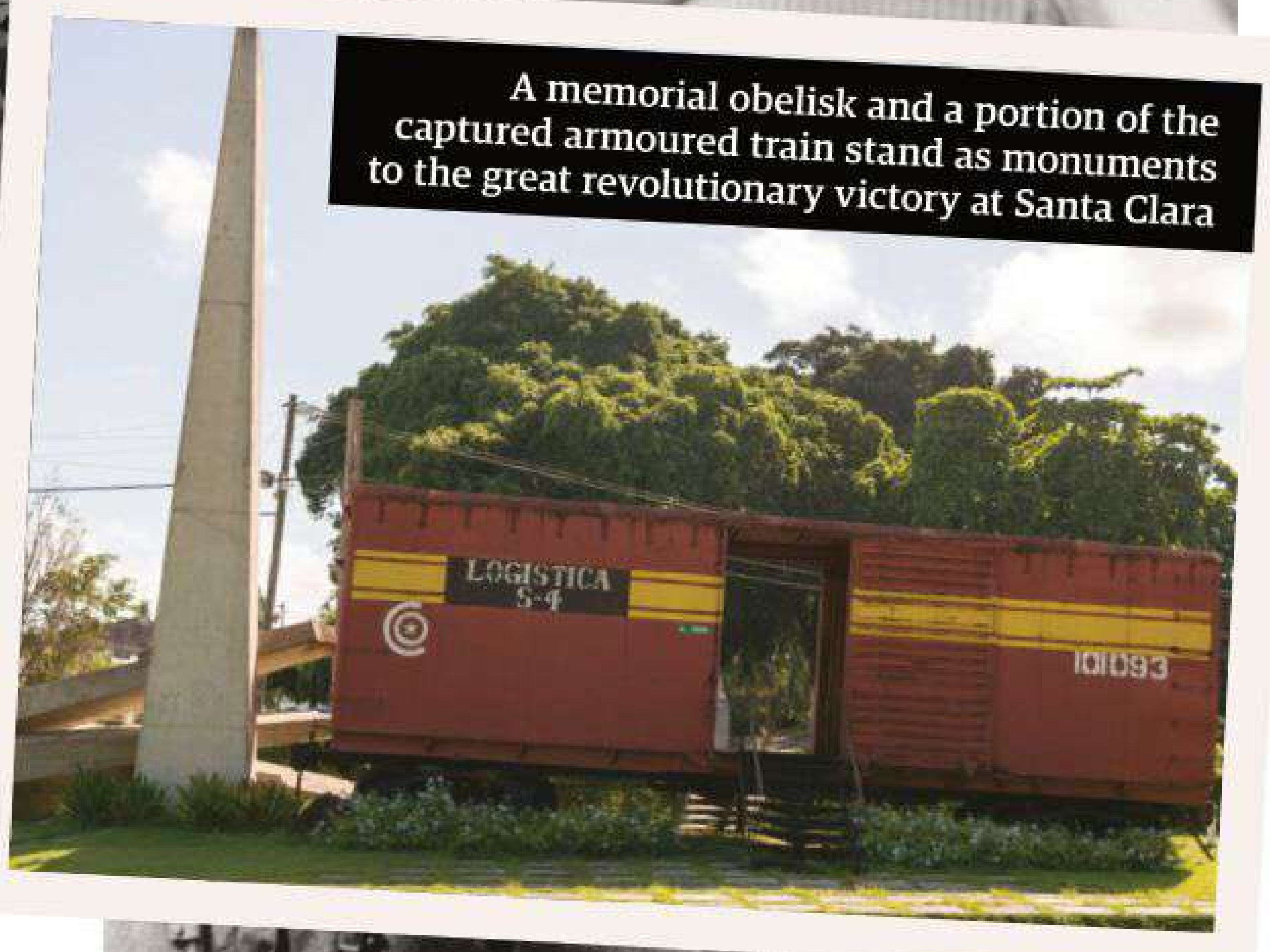
Trucks carry celebrants through the streets of Havana as the victory of the revolution is proclaimed in Cuba's capital city

During the march towards Santa Clara, Guevara and Cienfuegos gained the support of small bands of fighters that were previously conducting their own operations against the Batista regime. Advancing through the Escambray Mountains of Las Villas Province, Guevara encountered the March 13 Movement, also known as the Revolutionary Directorate, under the command of Rolando Cubela Secades, Juan 'El Mejicano' Abrahantes' and William Alexander Morgan, an expatriate American. A confrontation ensued, but in the end they cooperated with one another towards the common goal of overthrowing the Batista dictatorship.

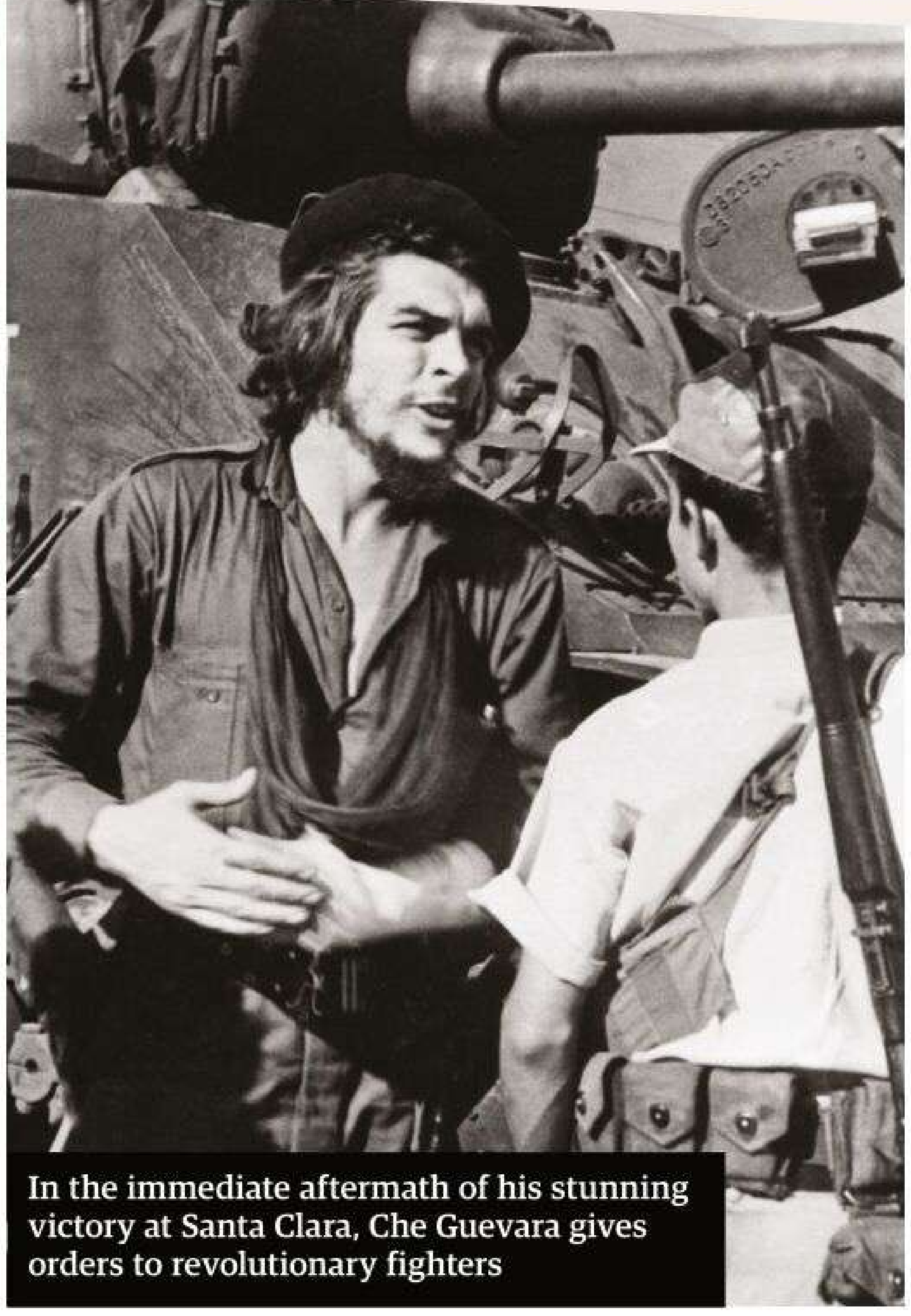
Cienfuegos gained fame in December when his forces won the Battle of Yaguajay, in Sancti Spíritus Province along the border of the Bay of Buena Vista, 83 kilometres (52 miles) from Santa Clara. The 26-year-old Cienfuegos initially had only about 60 fighters under his command, but along the march his ranks had swollen to more than 450. In mid-December, the rebels made contact with the garrison of Yaguajay, some 250 soldiers led by Captain Alfredo Abón Lee, a capable commander who understood the implications if his troops failed to hold the town.

The rebels attempted repeatedly to take Yaguajay by assault, and each time they were thrown back by the government troops. Lee was convinced that reinforcements would be coming from Santa Clara and clung grimly to the town for 11 days. During the siege, repeated calls for the garrison to surrender were ignored, and Cienfuegos became so frustrated that he ordered his men to fashion a makeshift tank, covering a farm tractor with armour plates and arming it with a jury-rigged flamethrower, hoping that it might breach the defensive line. The effort failed. But time was on the rebels' side, and slowly Captain Lee began to realise that he was on his own. By the end of the month, ammunition, food and medical supplies were too low to sustain

> After fleeing on New Year's Day, 1959, Batista was allowed to settle in Portugal, where he lived until his death in 1973



A memorial obelisk and a portion of the captured armoured train stand as monuments to the great revolutionary victory at Santa Clara



In the immediate aftermath of his stunning victory at Santa Clara, Che Guevara gives orders to revolutionary fighters the defence, and the garrison surrendered. The fall of Yaguajay jeopardised the ability of the Cuban Army to hold Santa Clara, and within hours a decisive battle for the seat of the provincial government was underway.

Amid cheering crowds, Guevara led his column from the coastal town of Caibarién along the road through Camajuaní and towards the decisive engagement at Santa Clara on 28 December 1958. Resistance was crumbling, as Caibarién had fallen into rebel hands like a ripe plum – virtually without a fight. At Camajuaní, the garrison fled before the growing strength of Guevara's advance, which eventually numbered nearly 350 fighters.

As he approached Santa Clara on 31 December, Guevara divided his force into two columns, the second led by Rolando Cubela. Shortly after the first column established contact with government forces, skirmishes and house-to-house fighting broke out in the town. Soon after, the barracks housing the loyalist Leoncio Vidal Regiment and 31 Regiment of the Rural Guard, commanded by Colonel Joaquín Casillas Lumpuy, came under attack from the second column. All the while, government aircraft strafed and buzzed the rebels while tanks came up cautiously to avoid the Molotov cocktails that were being hurled toward them.

Realising that the defenders of Santa Clara would be hard-pressed to hold the town, senior Cuban commanders dispatched an armoured train to deliver ammunition, automatic weapons and other supplies to the two regiments. Soldiers from the train established a command post at the foot of the hill of Capiro, north-east of Santa Clara, and when Guevara received word of the threat, he took immediate action.

Che sent a small group of fighters under the command of 23-year-old Roberto Rodríguez – who had already earned the nickname of 'El Vaquerito' during earlier battles – to seize the train, eliminate the command post and take the high ground at the hill of Capiro. Guevara did not expect this band of fighters to return alive and considered them a suicide squad willing to give their lives for the cause they considered larger than themselves.

Surprisingly – and probably due to their inherent lack of resolve to fight and die for Batista – the soldiers saw the rebels coming, abandoned the command post and boarded the train, which began a hasty retreat toward the centre of Santa Clara. Rodríguez, however, was killed in action. Whether the train's commander was aware of the situation or not is unclear, but the movement brought it closer to the centre of Guevara's strength. The exigency of battle spawned an inventive tactic as Che commandeered a bulldozer from the nearby school of agronomy at the University Marta Abreu of Las Villas. He ordered the drivers to disable the

## AN AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY

### A few Americans fought with Cuban revolutionaries to overthrow the Batista regime, and William Alexander Morgan was prominent among them

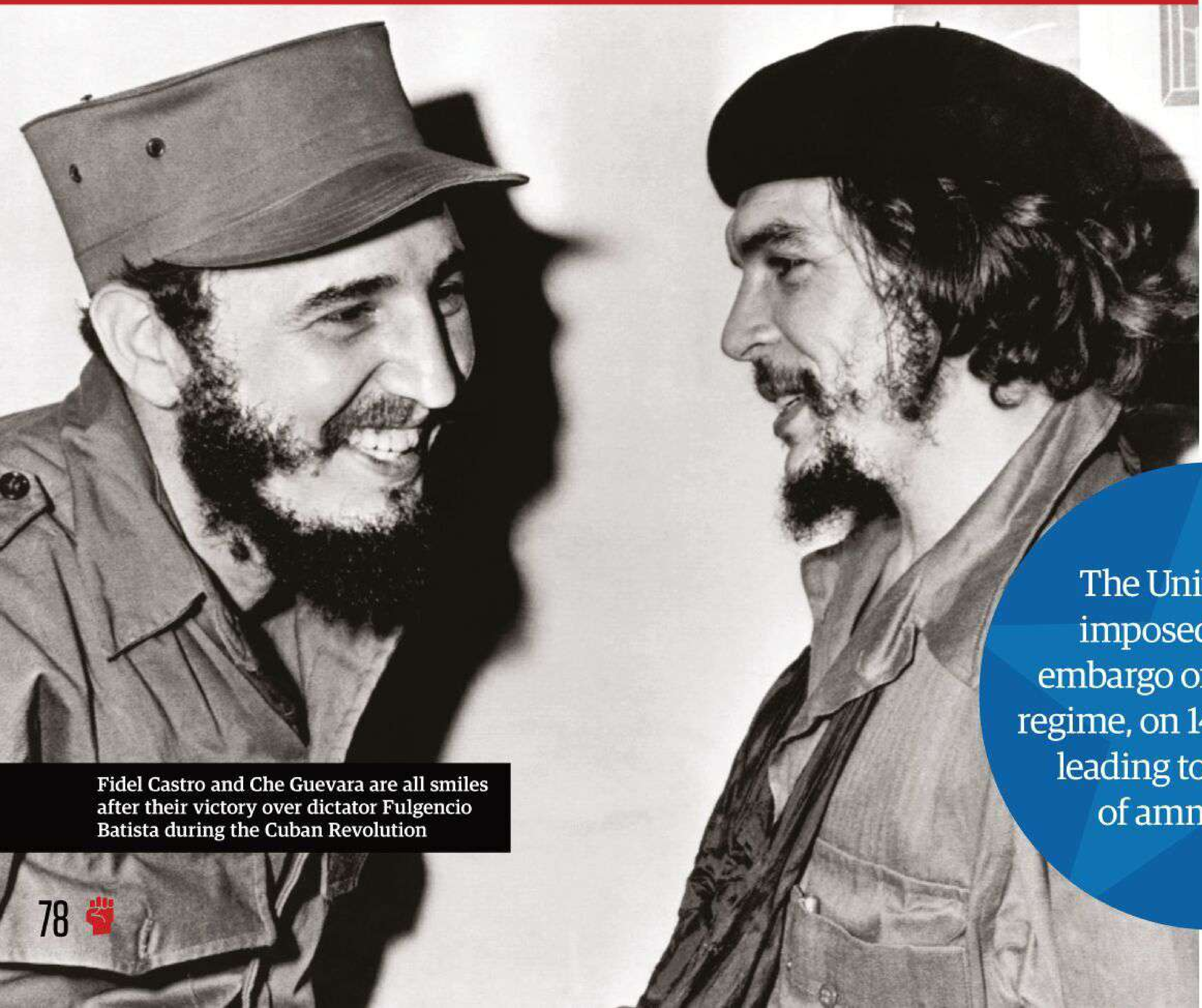
Roughly two dozen American citizens directly participated in the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro, and William Alexander Morgan was a key figure in the military campaign that led to the undoing of brutal dictator Fulgencio Batista. Morgan, who was not a communist and held firm to the belief that Castro would establish a representative democracy once victory was achieved, commanded rebels of the Second National Front of Escambray in the central mountainous region of Cuba.

**William Alexander Morgan (right) confers with Fidel Castro (left) and Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, who later sought asylum in the US**

Morgan was born in Cleveland, Ohio, served in the US Army, and received a dishonourable discharge after going AWOL (absent without leave). He spent two years in prison and abandoned his wife and children to take part in the fight against Batista, arriving in Cuba in 1957. By then, his checkered past included rumours that he had worked for organised crime and trained as a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operative.

After displaying extraordinary heroism in battle against government troops, Morgan held the rank of comandante in the Second National Front and led a contingent of rebel troops. During the last campaign of the revolution, he joined forces with Che Guevara's rebels during the victory at Santa Clara. He later quelled a coup attempt by Dominican leader Rafael Trujillo and lost his US citizenship.

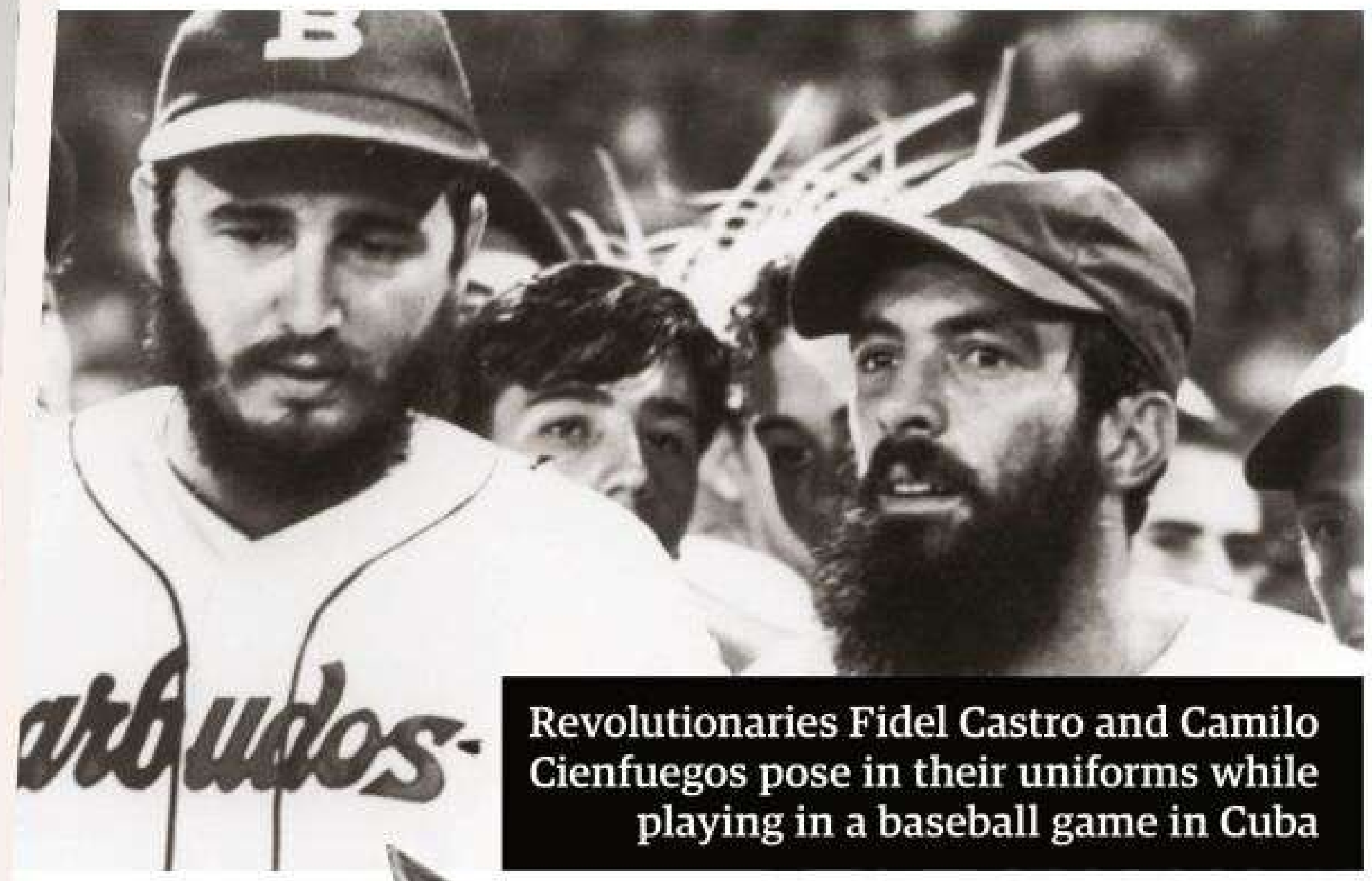
As Castro's true Marxist political perspective emerged in post-revolutionary Cuba, Morgan became disillusioned and was implicated in providing arms and leadership to anti-Castro forces. Ultimately, Castro had his former comrade arrested and shot by firing squad on 16 October 1960, for promoting counter-revolutionary activities. Morgan was 32 when he died.



**Fidel Castro and Che Guevara are all smiles after their victory over dictator Fulgencio Batista during the Cuban Revolution**

> The United States imposed an arms embargo on the Batista regime, on 14 March 1958, leading to a shortage of ammunition

Fidel Castro's younger brother, Raúl, who went on to head the Cuban Army for 49 years, before succeeding Fidel as overall leader in 2011


Revolutionaries Fidel Castro and Camilo Cienfuegos pose in their uniforms while playing in a baseball game in Cuba

Camilo Cienfuegos, carrying the large Cuban flag, leads a group of guerrillas as the end of the revolution nears

railroad track ahead of the train, which promptly derailed, spilling men and equipment across the neighbouring slope.

After a flurry of Molotov cocktails erupted in flames against the armoured flanks of the train, its commander quickly asked for a truce and agreed to surrender his troops, the train and its valuable contents to the rebels. About 350 government soldiers were taken prisoner and began to openly fraternise with Che's fighters, explaining their fatigue with the effort to suppress the revolution and their indifference for the Batista regime. The captured weapons were later appropriated and proved a bonanza for the ill-equipped revolutionaries. Many of the government officers surrendered to the first rebel forces they encountered, and by the middle of the day Guevara was announcing the fall of Santa Clara across Cuba via the rebel radio network.

One story of the Battle of Santa Clara continues to resonate with the Cuban people. Che had been injured in a fall during the battle for Caibarién, and his arm was in a sling. Nevertheless, he brandished his automatic weapon at Santa Clara, firing as he was able. When the gun jammed, he found a local machinist, Alberto Garcia, who repaired the weapon in his workshop amid the gunfire and explosions of the ongoing battle. Garcia still lives in the same house, and it has been reported that he personally came under fire during a short-lived effort to capture Guevara. The famed armoured train remains a national treasure and is on display at the national memorial and museum near the Santa Clara train depot. From the scene of his decisive victory, Guevara led a triumphant column towards the Cuban capital of Havana.

> After the Battle of Santa Clara, two commanders of the garrison and local police force were summarily executed by Guevara's men

On 31 December, in a last gasp of bravado, Fulgencio Batista had stepped to the microphone in Havana and declared that he might take up arms himself to inspire his troops to greater effort in suppressing Castro's rebel forces, who were gaining the upper hand across the island nation. However, when word reached the dictator that Santa Clara had fallen, the news came on the heels of other depressing developments. Batista lost heart, began to panic and fled the country. To the end, he misled the people as to the true state of affairs.

On 2 January 1959, journalist Alistair Cooke wrote, "President Fulgencio Batista of Cuba, who threatened two days ago to take the field and bolster the morale of his men, changed his mind last night and abdicated. He stayed in Havana long enough to proclaim a great government victory in the Battle of Santa Clara and then hopped a plane for the Dominican Republic leaving behind a junta which the rebels refuse to recognise. He took with him his chief military aides and put his eldest son and 53 other military leaders on a plane to Jacksonville, Florida. Ten of Batista's personal secret service officers arrived today in Miami, and yet another flight carrying most of the Batista cabinet and their families landed in New Orleans. Batista's two youngest sons had flown to Idlewild earlier on what was called a 'sightseeing tour'."

When one of Batista's sons arrived in Florida, an anti-Batista expatriate was waiting on the airport tarmac. Amid lax security, the man approached the son of the dictator, and a brawl ensued. Police were summoned and the assailant was dragged away. A handgun was discovered, but it was never used. Even as Batista's government disintegrated, Cuban refugees in the United States were already drawing distinct lines among themselves, including those who had supported the dictator and those who had fled from him.

While the end of the Batista era came swiftly in Havana, word of the fall of Santa Clara reached Fidel Castro on the morning of Che's great victory. Castro prevailed on the commander of Santiago de Cuba, the island nation's second-largest city, to surrender. Within hours, the city was in rebel hands as the government commander, Colonel Rubido, ordered his men to stand down and not to fire on Castro's fighters. On 1 January 1959, the leader of the revolution declared victory in the long struggle against Batista's repressive regime from a balcony at the city hall of Santiago de Cuba.

Che's march to Havana, meanwhile, was becoming a triumphant parade. He entered the capital city on 2 January, just as Castro was accepting the surrender of the garrison at Santiago de Cuba. Castro then undertook his own victory march, covering the 888 kilometres (552 miles) to Havana in less than a week. The Marxist leader entered the capital city on 8 January amid a throng of cheering supporters expressing joy at their liberation from the repressive dictatorship, but yet to fully contemplate life under the pro-Soviet regime that was to come. While hotspots of unrest flared up here and there, Castro travelled about the city inside a tank and with the protection of a heavy personal guard.

Five weeks later, Castro was sworn in as prime minister of Cuba. He had established himself as the head of the government and set about a campaign of consolidating power through the elimination of Batista loyalists and others who might oppose his rule. He asserted control of the Cuban Army, 30,000 soldiers strong, and installed key allies in positions of prominence and responsibility within the new government. Although their leaders were confident, the future was uncertain for the people of Cuba, and a long era of contention with the nation's powerful neighbour to the north, the United States, lay ahead.

© Getty Images

# THE RISE AND FALL OF THE MOB IN CUBA

American mobsters built a gambling empire in Cuba after World War II, only to see it come crashing down when Fidel Castro came to power

Written by
**MARC DESANTIS**

Havana, Cuba, the 'Paris of the New World', had been a gambling haven for a long time before the American Mob ever set its sights on it. As far back as the early 1930s, American mobster Meyer Lansky, one of the all-time greats in Mob history, had realised that the island had high potential when linked to the growth of inexpensive air travel. If he built hotel-casinos there, he would be able to draw visitors from far and wide to the island. Cuba would become a gambling powerhouse. In 1933, at a meeting at Charles 'Lucky' Luciano's residence at the Waldorf Towers in New York, Lansky convinced Luciano, legendary American gangster Bugsy Siegel, as well as several other mobsters, including Moe Dalitz, Chuck Polizzi and Phil Kastel, to each contribute $500,000 to jump-start the Mob's gambling operations in Cuba. Many had been confused as to why they should invest their money outside the United States, so Lansky explained to them that they needed a good place to invest the fortunes they had made from bootlegging liquor. Simply sticking the money in Swiss bank accounts to accrue interest slowly had little attraction for anyone.

With several million dollars collected and packed into briefcases, Lansky made his way to the Cuban strongman, Fulgencio Batista, who ruled Cuba through a series of puppet presidents, and promised him an annual income of $3-5 million. In return, Batista would safeguard the Mob's monopoly over the casino in the Hotel Nacional and the Oriental Park Racetrack. The Mob had gotten its start on the island.

## FULGENCIO BATISTA AND THE MOB

Batista himself, who was later president of Cuba from 1940 to 1944, and then again from 1952 to 1959, after a coup, kept a certain distance from Lansky. The benefits that flowed from the arrangement, apart from the broad ones of increased economic activity and boosted tourism to the island, were largely indirect. It wasn't so much a matter of Lansky forking over money to Batista, though that did happen. It was more a matter of the patronage, supply, contracts and jobs that Batista controlled via Lansky.

Batista had a strong reason for bringing in the mobsters. Havana had earlier become notorious for the crooked games that swindled American tourists of their money. Batista wanted to improve the tourists' experience so that more would visit Cuba. This meant getting rid of the rigged games. Ironically, Batista brought in Lansky, a criminal, in order to clean up the island's corrupt gambling industry. Lansky, though he was effectively partnering with the corrupt Batista regime, made it a priority to keep his gambling

Lucky Luciano claimed that Castro's crackdown on Mob activities in Cuba had cost him a full one-quarter of his income

> "Ironically, Batista brought in Lansky, a criminal, in order to clean up the island's corrupt gambling industry"

American and Cuban tourists at the Hotel Nacional casino in Havana, 1957 operations completely straight, because it was the honest games that brought in the high-rolling professional gamblers.

Batista made Lansky's and other mobsters' lives markedly easier with the enactment of Hotel Law 2074. This provided tax exemptions to new hotels and allowed any hotel with $1 million or more of new investment to apply for a casino licence. The Cuban government would also be willing to put up money of its own for projects that would encourage tourism. This was of course a legal mechanism by which Batista could funnel money to Lansky and his Mob associates, who would then return the favour by including the president's friends in the building and running of the new hotels and casinos.

## UNLUCKY LUCIANO

One man who would not enjoy the Cuban paradise was Lucky Luciano, the leading figure in the establishment of the American Mob as a nationwide, organised crime syndicate. After getting out of federal prison in 1946 he'd made his way to Cuba, hoping to become a player again in the American Mob after a long absence from the scene. At Lansky's behest, the mobsters, before they began conferring at the Havana Conference, where the American mobsters discussed their future plans for Cuba, met with Luciano at his residence in Miramar. All of those who turned up collectively delivered tribute in the amount of $150,000 to Luciano. Luciano would then give this money to Lansky as his investment in the casino in Havana's Hotel Nacional.

Luciano's high living in Cuba attracted too much attention. By early 1947, just weeks after the close of the Havana Conference, a photo appeared in a local newspaper showing Luciano hobnobbing with the famed American singer, Frank Sinatra. Another report later claimed that he had been seen in the company of Ralph Capone, brother of the infamous Chicago gangster, Al Capone. The Cuban secret police apprehended Luciano and let the American FBI interrogate him.

The FBI's long-time director, J Edgar Hoover, had been kept out of the loop concerning the help that Luciano had provided the US Navy in curbing Axis activity in the New York docks during World War II, and he wanted to learn more.

Luciano revealed that he had passed information on to American authorities. About his current activities in Cuba, he said that he was operating a gambling concession at the Hotel Nacional and the Jockey Club.

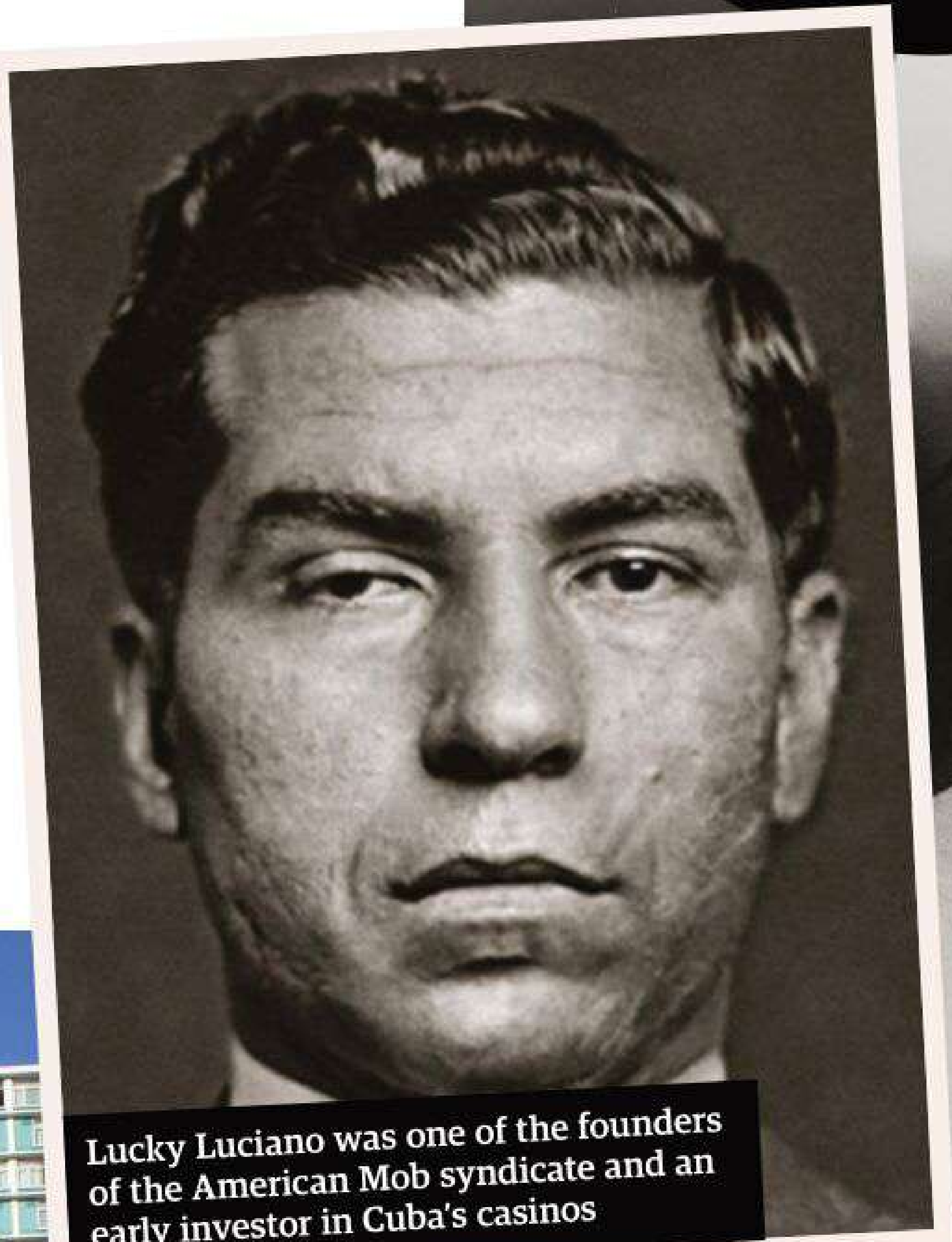
With the FBI having taken its measure of the man, another American agency, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, or FBN, entered the picture and demanded that Luciano be expelled. Luciano had himself been deported from the US to Italy just the previous year. The FBN raised the stakes and threatened to suspend all shipments of legal narcotics to Cuba until he was gone. The demand was front page news in Cuba and Luciano, terribly unhappy with the bad publicity, agreed to go back to Italy of his own accord instead of trying to fight his deportation.

> Meyer Lansky's Montmartre Club was an 'honest' operation, and big-time gamblers, who could spot a crooked game, preferred it for that reason

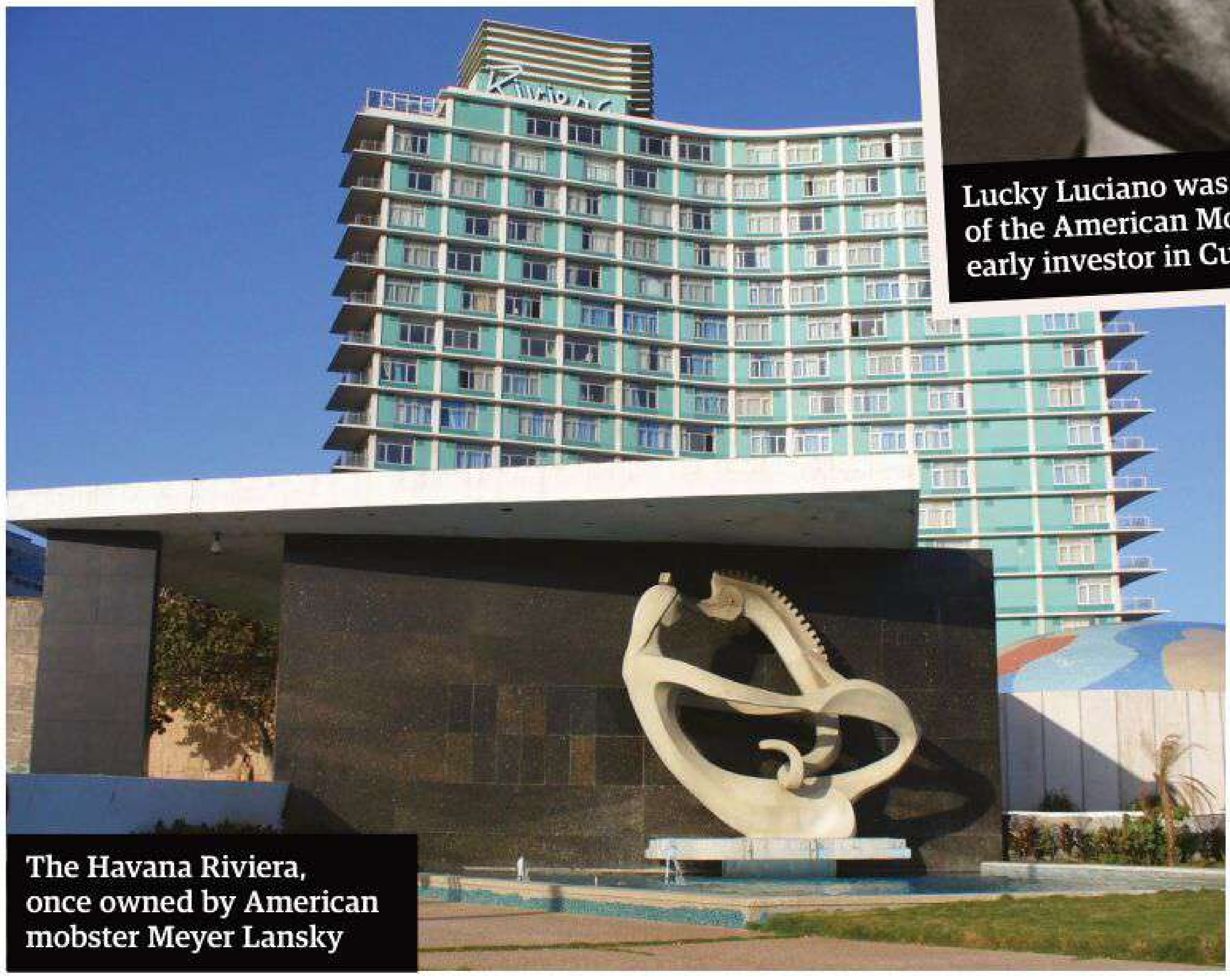
Then-president Ramón Grau San Martín declared Luciano to be an undesirable alien on 27 February 1947 and his expulsion was ordered. Luciano set sail for Italy on 20 March. Upon reaching Genoa, he spent nine days in jail. He was then sent to Palermo where he was jailed for another nine days. Luciano would in time move to Rome, but his days of living close to the United States, and having influence on the Mob there, were at an end.

## MOB EMPIRE

After the fabled Havana Conference, Mob operations were hardly easy. However they improved greatly in the 1950s. In that decade, with Batista holding the presidency from 1952 on, Cuba became a kind of wonderland for the gangsters, a nation in which they were effectively part of the establishment and had the protection of the country's leadership. Ever more extravagant hotel-casinos rose



Lucky Luciano was one of the founders of the American Mob syndicate and an early investor in Cuba's casinos



The Havana Riviera, once owned by American mobster Meyer Lansky

Meyer Lansky was the driving force behind the Mob's move into Cuba in the 1930s and 1940s in the Havana skyline. In 1956, Lansky began the construction of the Riviera, a 352-room hotel, in Havana. Naturally, it also housed a casino. It was a financial success from the moment it opened in December 1957. There were many others to keep it company, such as the Deauville, the Capri and the Comodoro, all owned by the Florida gangster Santo Trafficante. Besides Lansky's own Riviera there was the tremendous 660-room Havana Hilton. Then toward the end of the decade there was the planned Monte Carlo de la Habana, with construction due to start in August 1958. It was to contain 656 rooms and have a marina in addition to a helicopter landing pad on its grounds.

The mobsters were able to build and operate these huge hotels at a profit because the flow of foreign travellers looking to gamble or take in the famous shows in Havana was large and increasing. Air travel, once a luxury for only the wealthy, was coming down in cost. Cheaper airfares meant that a much larger swathe of the American public could make the trip to Cuba. Since Cuba lay only 144 kilometres (90 miles) from the United States, the journey was not especially long, just an hour from south Florida. The prospect of the new and glorious hotels going up on the island made Havana a particularly attractive destination. These tourists also loved to gamble, and the mobsters made money hand over fist as the visitors played the games in the casinos and lost money.

## ILL OMENS

The Mob did not have things go all its own way during the 1950s. There was also competition from another major gambling destination for business: Las Vegas. The Nevada gambling site had been hurting, mainly because visitors were being drawn away from it by Havana. To shore up the casinos, in April 1958 Nevada banned anyone who held a stake in an out-of-state gaming operation from also holding a gaming licence in Nevada. Owners were forced to choose between Las Vegas and Cuba. Many mobsters who had invested heavily in both places pulled out of Havana to protect their American interests.

Meanwhile, the Cuban Revolution, led by Fidel Castro, gathered steam. It was

The mobsters lost heavily in the Cuban Revolution, but Fulgencio Batista is said to have absconded with around $300 million when he fled Cuba

President Ramón Grau San Martín, during whose presidency the Mob held its 1946 conference in Havana

# THE HAVANA CONFERENCE OF 1946

## The Mob plots its moves in Cuba

A historic conference of American mobsters at Havana's posh Hotel Nacional charted the course for Mob activities on the island of Cuba

American mobster Meyer Lansky had been involved in Cuba since the 1930s. He had seen numerous possibilities to develop organised crime's operations on the island. Lansky was an astute operator in the criminal underworld, where death could come at any moment, and made sure to include other prominent mobsters in his plans for the island. In late December 1946, he convened a four-day conference in Havana of leading American gangsters to discuss the Mob's future in Cuba.

A strike by Cuban hotel workers threatened to derail the gangland conference at the last minute. The way was smoothed over for the mobsters through the intervention of President Ramón Grau San Martín. The hotel workers' union got the 30 per cent wage increase it wanted, so that the talks could go forward.

The meetings took place between 22-26 December. Virtually the whole of the American Mob was represented, with envoys coming from New York, Chicago, and many other places. Santo Trafficante made the trip from Tampa, Florida, while Carlos Marcello was there on behalf of the New Orleans Mob. Also present was Albert Anastasia, one of the heads of Murder, Inc, the Mob's infamous murder-for-hire outfit.

The conference itself was conducted in the two uppermost floors of Havana's Hotel Nacional. No one not associated with the Mob was even allowed into the hotel while the meeting was going on. A massive banquet was held on the first night. This was followed by an evening of debauchery in which the gangsters held parties with showgirls and prostitutes.

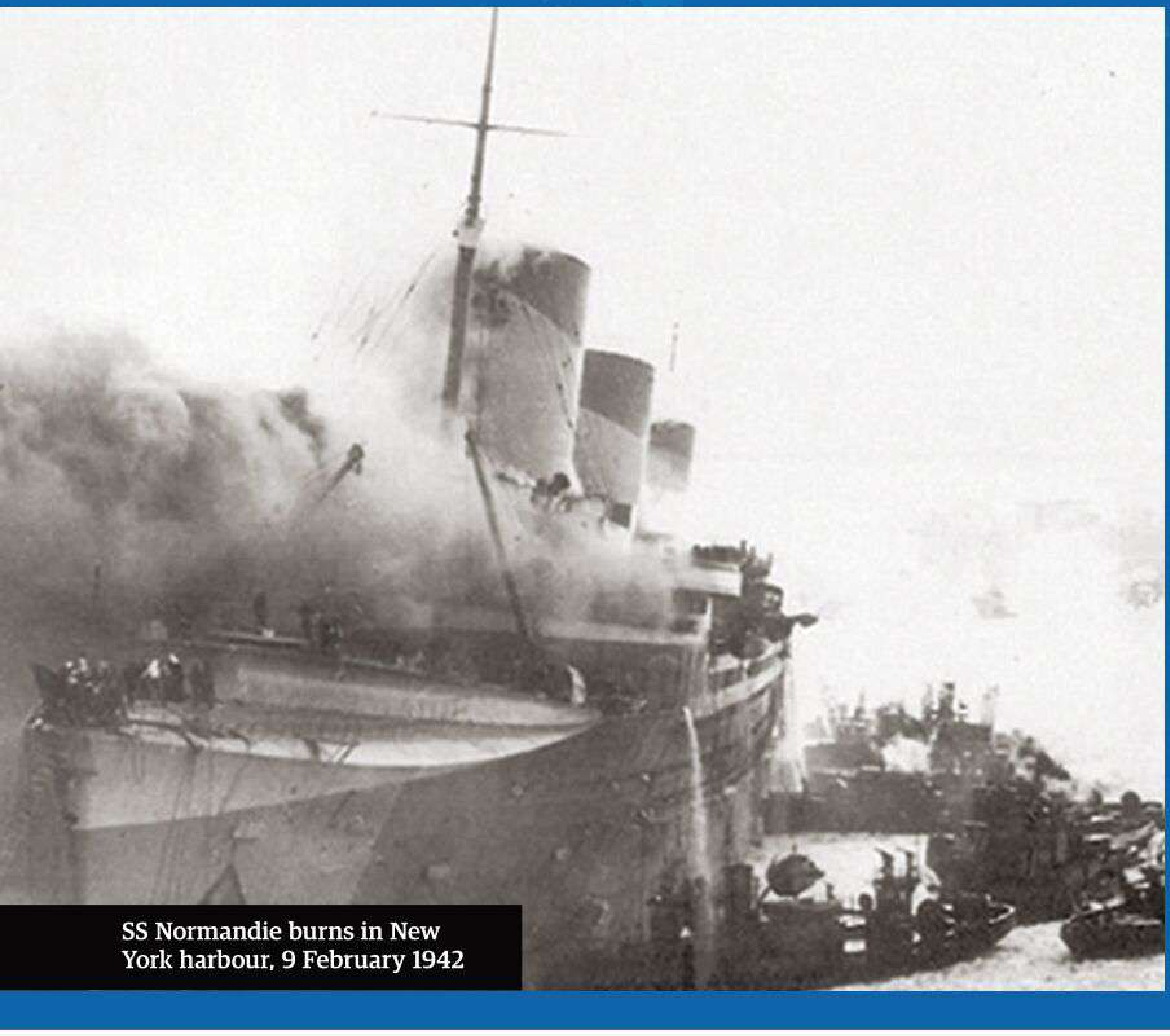
On the second day, the mobsters held three meetings. Lansky explained his idea for Cuba to them. The island was to be turned into the biggest gambling centre in the world. Lansky won the approval of the assembled gangsters, and Cuba was on its way to becoming a Mob stronghold.

The 1946 Havana Conference was held in the uppermost floors of the Hotel Nacional

## LUCKY IN CUBA

### How Lucky Luciano got out of jail and made his way to Cuba

Lucky Luciano, a leading figure in the American Mob since Prohibition days, headed to Cuba in a bid to restore his influence



SS Normandie burns in New York harbour, 9 February 1942

In December 1941, Lucky Luciano was sitting in a federal prison on prostitution convictions, serving a minimum sentence of 30 years. Luciano's road to freedom began with the entry of the United States into World War II. With America at war with Germany, Japan and Italy, fears of Axis sabotage were running rampant. Axis U-boats were sinking Allied ships along the US East Coast at an alarming rate in early 1942. There were fears of sabotage in American ports that would cripple the war effort. Such anxieties were not groundless. On 9 February 1942, the French ocean liner Normandie was sunk in harbour as a result of a mysterious fire. A German hand in its destruction was suspected.

The US Navy was understandably worried about sabotage in the port of New York. Naval Intelligence now made its approach to Luciano. As one of the foremost chiefs of the American Mob, Luciano would be able to secure the cooperation of the necessary people to tamp down any threat of Axis sabotage or other pro-Axis activities. Answering the US Navy's request for aid was an attractive proposition to Lucky in that otherwise he would not have had an opportunity for parole until 1956 at the earliest. Luciano's men went to work and suppressed enemy elements in the docks. Immodestly, Luciano would later say that "I won the war single-handed".

There was never any official quid pro quo for Luciano's help from the US government. However on account of the assistance he provided, in January 1946, with the war over, Luciano's sentence was commuted and he was deported to Italy, having served just nine years of his original sentence. Once in Italy, Luciano was able to secure a visa to go to Cuba later that same year, so he could be present for the Havana Conference.

sustained by the severe economic inequalities that plagued the island, which were perhaps not entirely visible from a posh hotel-casino in Havana. The mobsters may have thought they had established a haven for themselves in Cuba and were invincible, but they were mistaken. Everything they had would crumble within a few years.

The revolution appeared more successful towards the end of the decade. By 1958, Batista no longer had a solid grip on power and his days began to look numbered to many observers, including the US government, which had lost faith in him. The State Department was pressing him to step down and even leave Cuba. Batista resisted, but eventually saw the writing on the wall, resigning himself to going into exile in the United States. When he left Cuba in the early morning of New Year's Day 1959, the mobsters were left without their great patron. To Lansky, Batista's departure meant that Castro and his rebels had won.

## TRIUMPH OF THE REVOLUTION

Once Castro was in power, the executions of his opponents in the old regime began, often without trial. Castro's triumph was an upheaval for the mobsters who had retained interests in Cuba. In the minds of many Cubans, the gangsters had come to represent so much that was wrong with the corrupt Batista regime. Castro himself would use 'gangster' for decades afterward as a term of opprobrium against American officials.

Some mobsters clung to the belief that Castro could not last long in power. One of these was Santo Trafficante, one of Havana's leading mobster casino owners. "Castro is a complete nut!" he said. "Either Batista will return or someone else will replace this guy because there's no way the economy can continue without tourists, and this guy is closing all the hotels and casinos. This is a temporary storm. It'll blow over."

Trafficante was utterly wrong about Castro's staying power. He was arrested by the new regime, imprisoned and released only after paying an enormous bribe in the amount of $100,000 to secure his freedom. By October 1959, he had departed Cuba forever. Trafficante lost so heavily in Cuba with the coming of the revolution that he was completely broke when he went back to America.

Havana's Capri hotel, in which American mobster Santo Trafficante had interests

The coming to power of Fidel Castro in Cuba in 1959 changed all of the Mob's calculations and was the death knell for its operations there. Fulgencio Batista, their great patron and protector, was now gone. Castro had seen the casinos and the mobsters who ran them as outposts of American imperialism. "We are not only disposed to deport the gangsters but to shoot them," he said. However, economic realities temporarily stayed Castro's hand against the Mob. In January 1959, a large number of out-of-work casino employees had protested at the closure of the casinos. Cuba's revolutionary fighters had busied themselves with ripping apart the casinos, but now Castro restrained them. He was well aware of how much money there was to be made from the casinos, and he required mobsters, such as Lansky, who had the necessary know-how to operate them successfully.

When the Cuban Revolution triumphed, a truckload of pigs was unleashed to run wild through the lobby of Meyer Lansky's Riviera hotel

Castro himself made overtures to Lansky, who had returned back to America. Lansky had fled the island in one of the last planes to bolt from Havana, landing in Miami. Left behind on the island, Lansky would ruefully claim, was some $17 million in cash that could not be spirited out in time. Lansky sent emissaries, including his brother, Jake Lansky, to Cuba in order to speak directly with Castro.

Lansky had never shared the optimism of some in the United States about the new revolutionary Cuban leader. Even though the casinos had been allowed to open their doors again, having been in Cuba, he had seen first-hand that the new Cuban government was unmistakably Marxist in ideology. Lansky felt that he had to let the US government know what the truth was about Castro and his regime, which included hardcore revolutionaries such as Che Guevara. Lansky arranged a meeting with the FBI in his lawyer's offices on 22 May 1959.

The Cuban government was filled with communists, Lansky told the interviewing agent. The whole of it would eventually be communist too and deeply anti-American. Castro's finance minister was none other than the revolutionary guerilla Che Guevara. A bank that was now under the purview of Guevara alleged that the casinos were skimming from the take and took over the counting of the money that was coming in. A number of the Mob's casino operators had also been imprisoned.

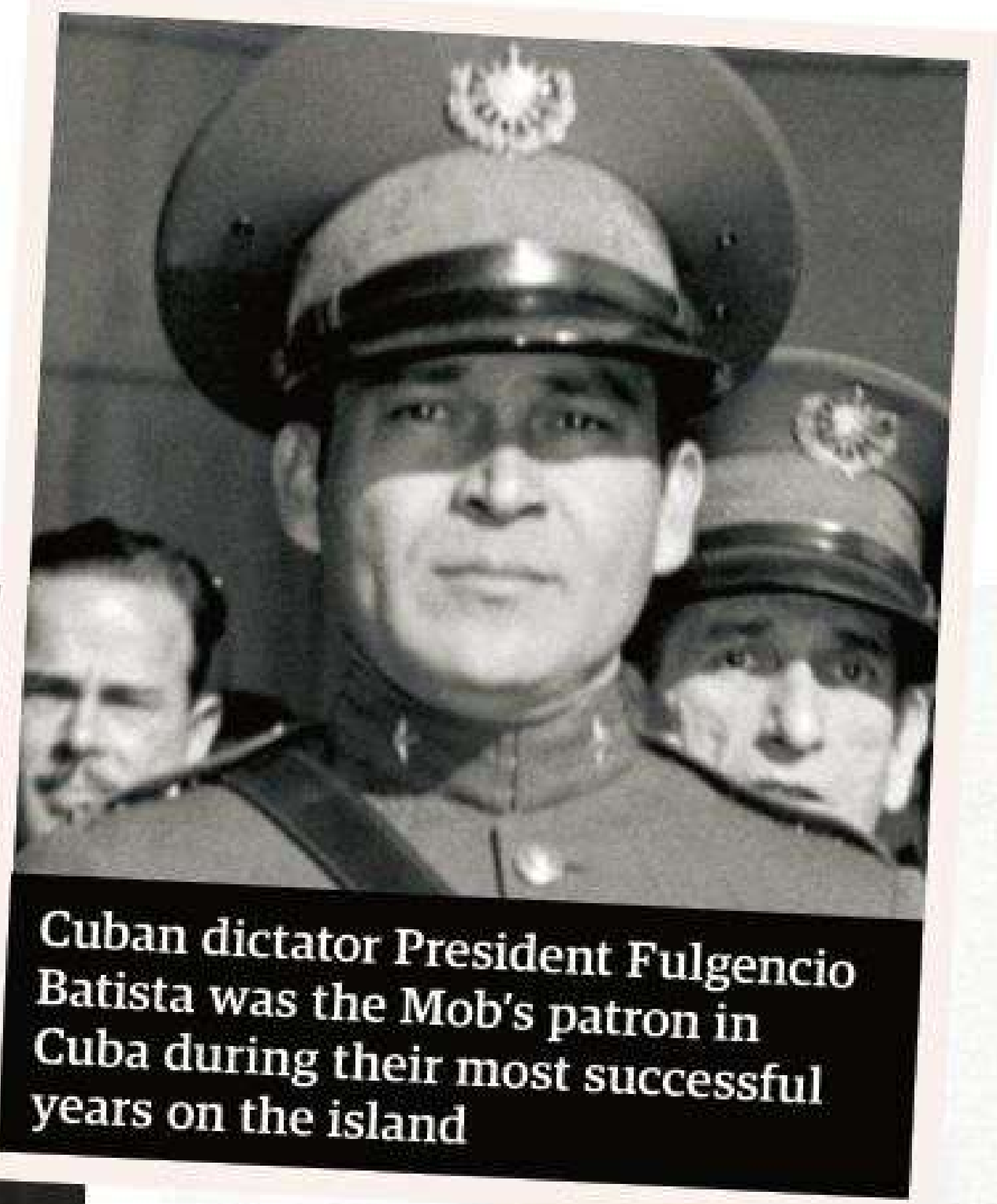
"The coming to power of Fidel Castro changed all of the Mob's calculations and was the death knell for its operations there"

Despite Lansky's warnings, it appears that the FBI's report of the interview was never forwarded to anyone else in the US government. That might have been because the risk of losing face was too high for anyone in the Bureau to pass along a report coming from a source as odious as a known mobster such as Lansky. In hindsight, however, Lansky appears to have been prescient. By 1960 Castro had declared that the Cuban Revolution was a socialist one and he had opened diplomatic relations with the USSR. In October 1960, the Mob's holdings in Cuba were stripped from them and all of the hotels and casinos were nationalised.

Lansky, it is said, concocted a scheme to assassinate Castro using some of his people who had remained behind on the island. Many of them were casino workers who stood to lose their jobs under a communist government. This would potentially pave the way for the return of Batista. Lansky made an overture to the CIA, supposedly even offering to pay for the operation out of his own pocket, but got nowhere. Lansky then ended his talks with Castro, who tossed Jake and Lansky's other intermediaries into jail. Lansky asked Castro for their release, insisting that it was not their fault that an agreement could not be reached. Jake and the others were let go after spending 25 days in a Havana prison. There was ultimately, very little that Lansky could do about Castro. He licked his wounds and now put his efforts into Las Vegas, that other great gambling emporium dominated by the American Mob.

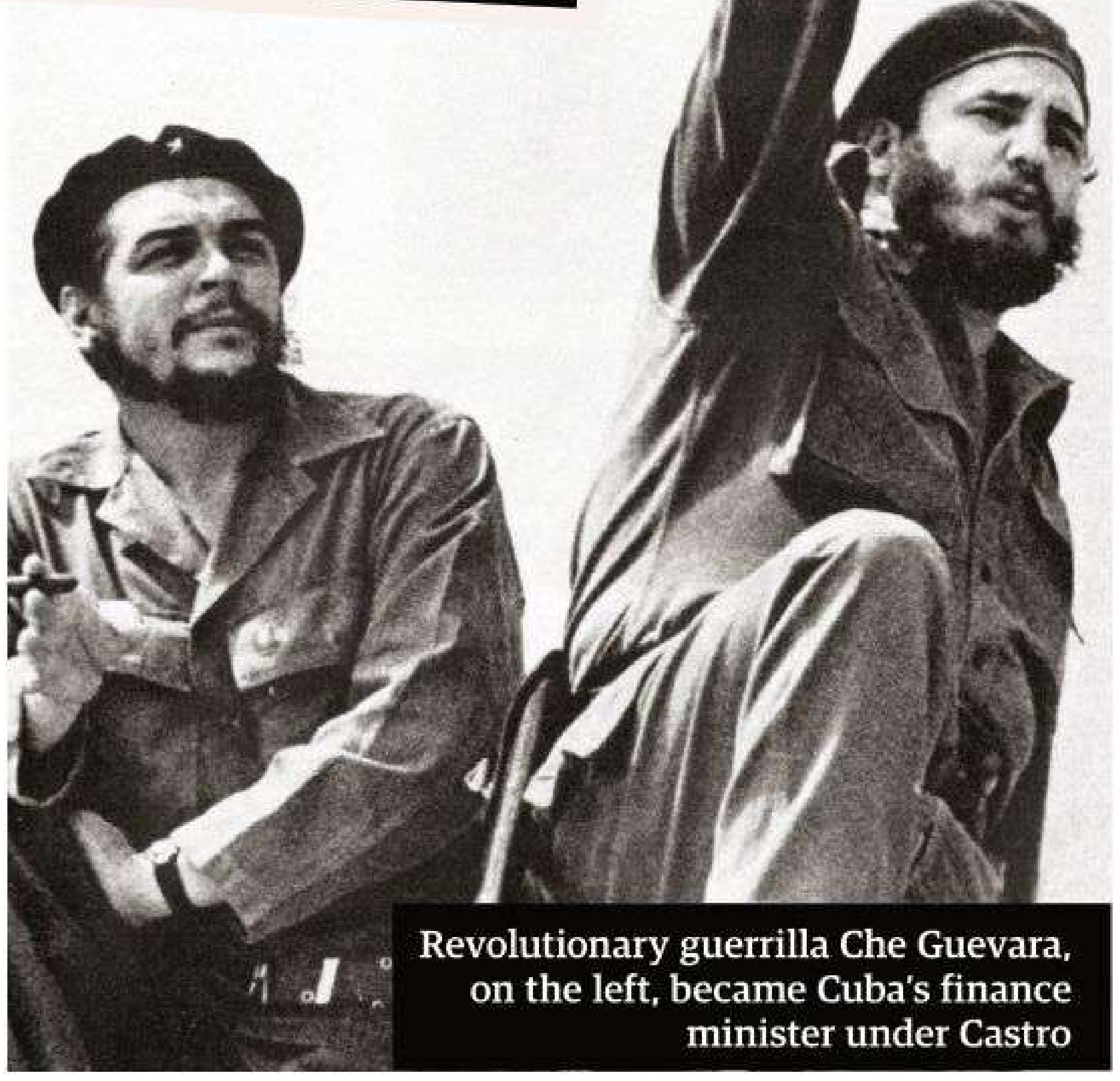
In the 1950s, Pan American Airlines charged a mere $39 fare for a round-trip flight from Miami to Cuba

Others besides Lansky wanted Castro dead. The CIA may have ignored Lansky, but it came around to the belief that Castro had to be eliminated. It conceived several schemes. It approached Trafficante, once he was back in the US, with plans to kill Castro. Infuriated by how the Castro regime had treated him, Trafficante became part of nascent plots to assassinate the Cuban leader. Trafficante was paid about $25,000 out of a total of $150,000 by the CIA for the hit. The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 brought an end to official US efforts to kill Castro, and Trafficante likewise abandoned his plans, too. The Mob had been ejected from Cuba, and their fallen empire would never be rebuilt.



Cuban dictator President Fulgencio Batista was the Mob's patron in Cuba during their most successful years on the island

Florida mobster Santo Trafficante was a major Mob player in Cuban gambling and lost heavily when Castro came to power



Revolutionary guerrilla Che Guevara, on the left, became Cuba's finance minister under Castro

© Getty Images

# MARTYR OR MURDERER? CHE GUEVARA

The remarkable and radical life of a qualified doctor, guerrilla fighter, and unflinching executioner in Cuba's Revolution who sought to export Marxist rebellion across Latin America

Written by
**IAN RIMMER**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

He'd had beer, probably plenty, but it was consumed in celebration rather than for courage. The day before, the Bolivian Army had been in a fierce firefight with communist guerrillas trapped in a mountainside gulley. The enemy had been routed and a few had been captured. But there had been dead on both sides, so when an officer called for an execution volunteer, Sergeant Mario Terán was more than ready to avenge his fallen Bolivian brothers. Beer was not going to affect his aim.

Terán stepped into the humble schoolhouse, the main prisoner's makeshift cell. The captive was filthy, his hair a tangled mess, his clothes torn and ragged. Rather than boots, he'd tied pieces of leather to his feet. Lying on the dirt ground, bleeding from a bullet hole in his leg, he was the very embodiment of the words 'wounded animal'. Terán raised his semi-automatic rifle.

Legend has it that the prisoner said: "I know you have come to kill me. Shoot, coward, you are only going to kill a man." Terán fired. He hit the captive's arms and legs, as he was supposed to make it look like the guerrilla had died in the firefight. As the man writhed on the ground, Terán fired again, fatally hitting his target's thorax. The prisoner's name was Che Guevara. The world's most feared Marxist revolutionary was dead.

39 years earlier, in 1928, Ernesto Guevara de la Serna was born in Rosario, Argentina – and his first brush with death was not far away. Severe breathing difficulties were diagnosed as asthma, and at times the choking attacks were so violent they were feared life-threatening. Often bed-ridden, young Ernesto had time to think, to contemplate his illness, to realise that his next breath, if he could catch it, might actually be his last. Startlingly early in life he became aware of his own mortality. By facing the proximity of death, and not fearing it, he refused to let the illness define him. Yet that live-in-the-moment outlook stayed with him – many years later, his fearlessness in the face of death led Fidel Castro to express surprise that he made it through the Cuban Revolution alive.

The Guevara family moved often during Ernesto's formative years, always searching for an area of Argentina with a climate that might alleviate his condition. Eventually, they came to Alta Gracia, a small town at the foot of the Sierras Chicas in the province of Córdoba, where the dry mountain air offered their firstborn some relief. There, as siblings arrived and the family grew, they continued to move house, meaning the concept of settling, of putting down roots, was something Ernesto never really knew.

His parents were both well educated, coming from families that, while not rich, were far from poor. Due to his illness, Ernesto's schooling was initially intermittent, involving a lot of home tutoring from his mother. Later, as management of his asthma improved, so did his school attendance. He was considered an able, intelligent student, though not one overly interested in the school syllabus. Perhaps this was because in his teenage years he was reading widely and extensively, from political works to French classicists like Dumas and Zola and American authors like Steinbeck. He was also keen on chess and, despite his illness and scrawny physique, a tough and enthusiastic rugby player, even enlisting

el Socialismo

someone to run alongside him down the touchline with his inhaler if it was needed.

By 1947, Ernesto was eligible for conscripted military service, but he was exempted because of his asthma. It was the one time he was grateful for his feeble lungs as it allowed him to continue studying. He enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Buenos Aires, intent on becoming a doctor. Oddly, given this choice, his personal hygiene was notoriously poor. He rather delighted in being nicknamed El Chancho ('the Pig') due to his pungent body odour, just as he enjoyed wearing old, unfashionable or grubby clothes – as much for shock value as anything else.

Such idiosyncrasies would not bother someone who wished to travel, however, and this was something Ernesto was keen to do during university breaks. He first took off alone on a bicycle fitted with a small motor in 1950. As much a test of his own willpower to keep his illness at bay as the bike's hardiness, he travelled some 4,500 kilometres (2,800 miles) to the far north of Argentina. He kept a diary of his adventures, as he did on a subsequent trip he made with his friend Alberto Granado. That one began in January 1952, on a motorbike christened 'The Mighty One', even though it broke down numerous times and was eventually abandoned. The trip took the pair across Argentina to Chile, Peru, Columbia and Venezuela. Ernesto went on further alone, visiting Miami in the United States and returning to Argentina in September 1952.

The diaries gave a clear indication of how the poverty and deprivation that Ernesto witnessed on his travels informed and shaped his world view. Prior to his journeys, even though he had read much political theory, he had not declared himself a supporter of any formal political doctrine. Yet witnessing the poor, the sick and the exploitation – often by companies from the United States – of the indigenous populations of Latin America had affected him deeply.

By October, Ernesto was back studying in Buenos Aires, working towards the exams needed to pass his medical degree. He phoned home one day six months later, stressing that it was Doctor Guevara de la Serna speaking. Almost immediately after qualifying, Ernesto began planning another trip, this time with his friend Calica Ferrer. They set off on 7 July 1953, heading for Caracas in Venezuela, where Alberto was working.

During the trip the pair learned there were revolutionary changes taking place in Guatemala. Ernesto was intrigued. They were together in Ecuador when Calica received an offer to coach a football team in Quito. Ernesto was invited too, but he wanted to continue north, so they split up. They never saw each other again.

# THE ROAD FROM ERNESTO TO CHE

## The journey that led to a sickly, far-from-poor Argentine youngster signing up to join a revolution in Cuba

**14 June 1928**
The first child of Ernesto Guevara-Lynch and Celia de la Serna, both from well-educated, well-heeled Argentine families, is named after his father. For distinction, he's referred to as Ernestito.

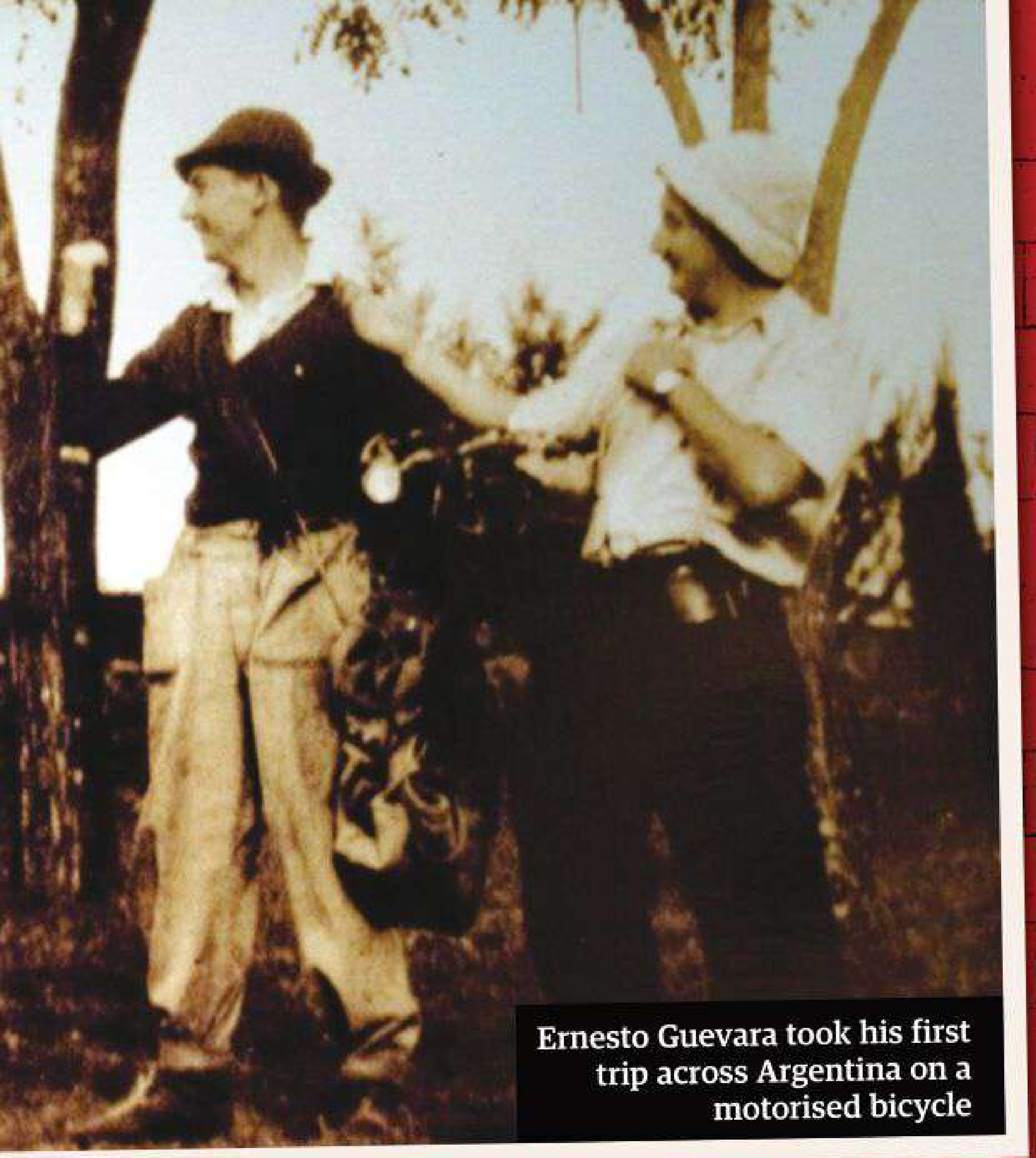
**1930**
The family return to Buenos Aires for the birth of their second child. There, Ernestito begins having breathing difficulties. The problem is eventually diagnosed as asthma – and it becomes chronic.

**1942**
Often forced to stay home through his illness, Ernestito reads voraciously. Management of his asthma steadily improves and he attends a good school in Córdoba, making friends with Tomás Granado.

**1943**
Tomás's older brother Alberto runs a rugby team. The far-from-robust Ernestito nevertheless joins, plays fearlessly, and earns a new nickname from Alberto, 'Fuser', from part furibundo (furious), part Serna.

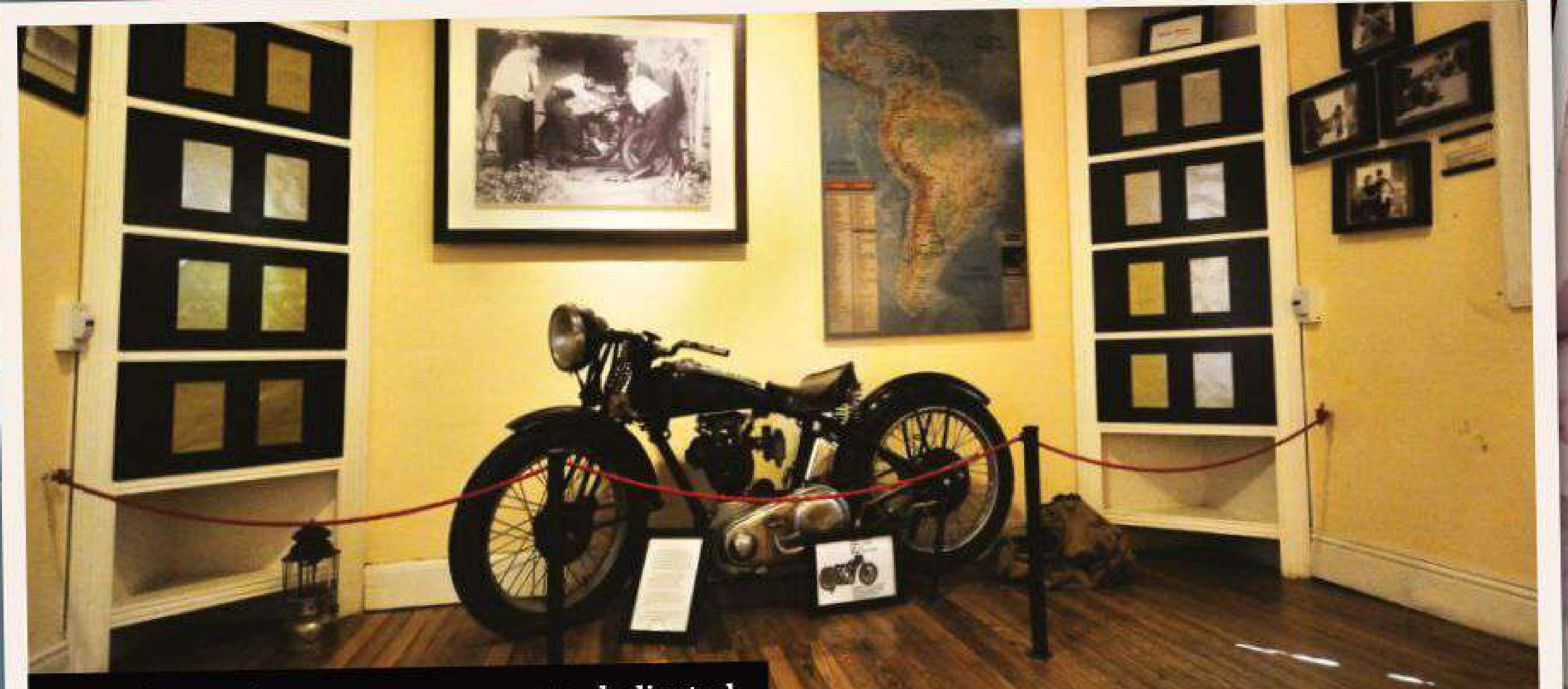
**1947**
Fuser and Alberto, a biochemistry student who is also widely read, become firm friends. After graduating from school, Fuser enrols to study medicine at Buenos Aires University, Argentina.

**4 January 1952**
During a break from their university studies, Fuser and Alberto begin an epic journey on motorbikes to truly discover their South American continent.


Ernesto Guevara took his first trip across Argentina on a motorised bicycle

En route to Guatemala, Ernesto stopped in Costa Rica, where he met influential political thinkers such as Juan Bosch, who later became president of the Dominican Republic, and Rómulo Betancourt, a future president of Venezuela. Ernesto's political awareness couldn't fail to grow.

And in Guatemala, it mushroomed. First he met Hilda Gadea, a left-wing exile from Peru. Ernesto was a strikingly handsome man and, despite his shabby clothes and lax washing habits, he'd had numerous lovers. Hilda, though no Latin beauty, was as well-read as Ernesto, and they struck up a deep relationship. Her social circle included many exiles from other Latin American countries under right-wing military dictatorships. Included in those that Ernesto met were several Cubans who


In his former home, now a museum dedicated to his life, the motorcycle on which Che travelled across South America is displayed

Che with his second wife Aleida March and their four children

**11 February 1952**
En route, the pair witness widespread poverty and medical deprivation. At a copper mine run by United States monopolies in Chile, they encounter ruthless exploitation of the indigenous population.

**26 September 1952**
After visiting Chile, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela, and meeting the likes of Dr Hugo Pesce, an influential Marxist scientist, Fuser returns to university in Buenos Aires to complete his medical degree.

**24 December 1953**
The now qualified Dr Guevara de la Serna has begun another trip. After hearing of revolutionary social reforms taking place in Guatemala, he arrives in Guatemala City.

**31 December 1953**
Dr Guevara meets Hilda Gadea. She has a wide circle of friends and at a New Year's Eve party, he meets a group of Cuban exiles from a failed attack on the Moncada Barracks.

**1954**
The Cubans call him Che, from his Argentine manner of speaking. Che witnesses the fall of the Guatemala regime first hand and notes the mistakes that its leaders had made.

**1955**
Fidel Castro, the Cuban exiles' leader, arrives in Mexico. He meets an Argentine doctor, they talk all night, and Fidel's planned revolution gains a new recruit – Che Guevara.

# TAKING CUBA

From a shipwreck to mountain hideouts, the guerrilla fighters had a perilous journey to the capital

### HAVANA

2 January 1959

**7** Within hours of Santa Clara's fall, Batista flees the country. Che and Cienfuegos push on to Havana and take control of the city without opposition. Castro, on a victory march up the country, joins them six days later.

### SANTA CLARA

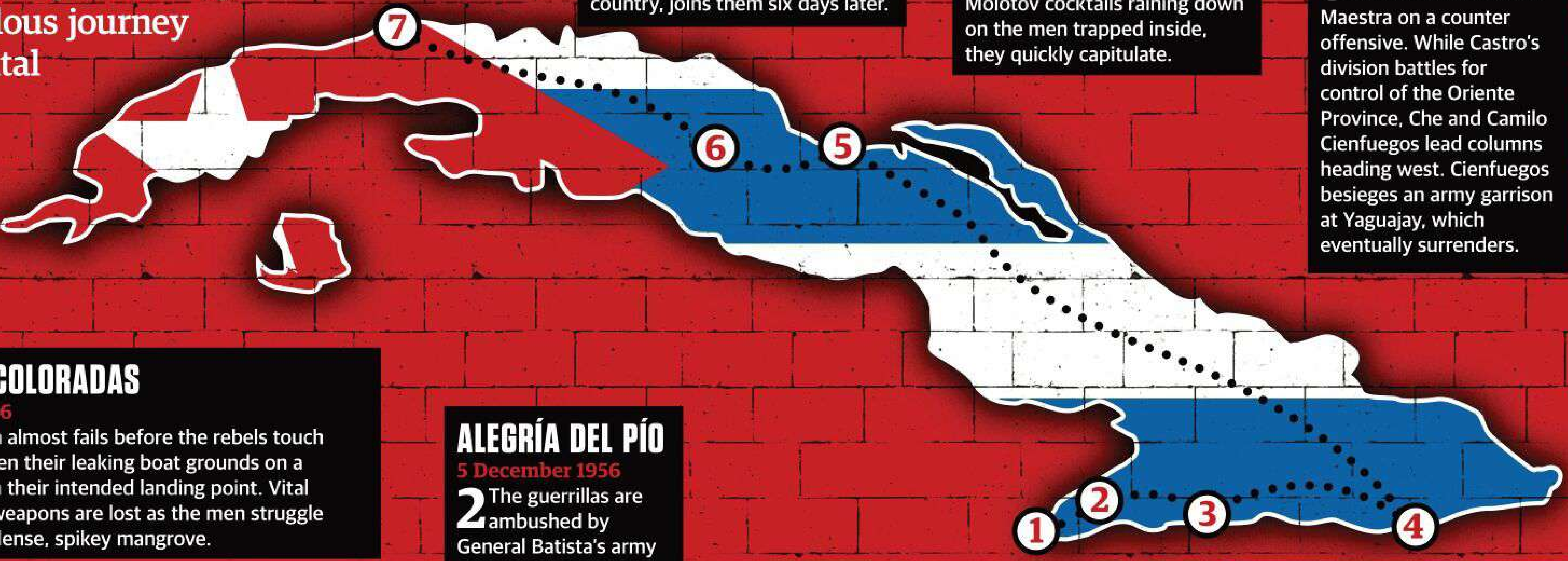
31 December 1958

**6** Batista sends an armoured train with hundreds of men and weapons to help defend Santa Clara. Che's force ambushes it after using tractors to rip up the tracks. With Molotov cocktails raining down on the men trapped inside, they quickly capitulate.

### YAGUAJAY

19-30 December 1958

**5** The rebels sweep down from the Sierra Maestra on a counter offensive. While Castro's division battles for control of the Oriente Province, Che and Camilo Cienfuegos lead columns heading west. Cienfuegos besieges an army garrison at Yaguajay, which eventually surrenders.



### PLAYA LAS COLORADAS

2 December 1956

**1** The revolution almost fails before the rebels touch Cuban soil when their leaking boat grounds on a sandbar, far from their intended landing point. Vital equipment and weapons are lost as the men struggle ashore through dense, spikey mangrove.

### ALEGRÍA DEL PÍO

5 December 1956

**2** The guerrillas are ambushed by General Batista's army near a sugar plantation. Che is wounded, others killed, others still captured and executed. The survivors scatter. In the thick-forested, sparsely populated mountains of the Sierra Maestra, they gradually regroup.

### SIERRA MAESTRA

17 February 1957

**3** A *New York Times* reporter, Herbert Matthews, visits their camp and writes about the impressive mountain guerrillas – even though he's tricked into thinking there are far more men than there actually are. Inspired, underground groups begin forming across Cuba.

### LA PLATA

11-21 July 1958

**4** Continuously recruiting and training locals, the rebels harass the army. Batista launches an offensive against them, but it goes disastrously wrong at La Plata. 500 soldiers are killed, wounded or captured by Castro's vastly outnumbered force.

had escaped the island after a failed attack on a barracks. Their leader, still imprisoned in Cuba, was Fidel Castro.

Guatemala had become a haven for political exiles because its government, under President Jacobo Arbenz, was instigating sweeping social reforms including land rights, education and suffrage. This angered American interests, particularly the United Fruit Company. By the spring of 1954, there were strong rumours that rebels, backed by the CIA, were planning to overthrow the president. When planes began bombing raids in the summer, the rumours were confirmed.

Ernesto confessed in letters home that he found the raids thrilling, feeling "...a magic sensation of invulnerability."

He joined a medical unit to help as the fighting intensified, telling everyone who would listen that Arbenz should arm the population to allow them to defend their revolution. As it happened, perhaps under pressure from his military, perhaps attempting to avoid bloodshed, the president resigned, allowing the rebels to take power. Soon, everyone connected with the previous regime, or suspected of communist leanings, were being rounded up. Hilda was arrested. Ernesto took refuge in the Argentine embassy.

He was there a month before being allowed passage to Mexico while Hilda, released from prison after a few days, later joined him. By now, Ernesto's political beliefs were crystallising. He was viewing the region of South America as a whole, believing its various indigenous populations were being exploited and kept in poverty by colonialist corporations largely from the United States. Those populations needed to drive out their abusers from the north, then defend their new freedoms, violently if necessary. He was still unsure, though, if he should attach himself to a particular cause or continue travelling on to Europe – until, in the summer of 1955, he met Fidel Castro.

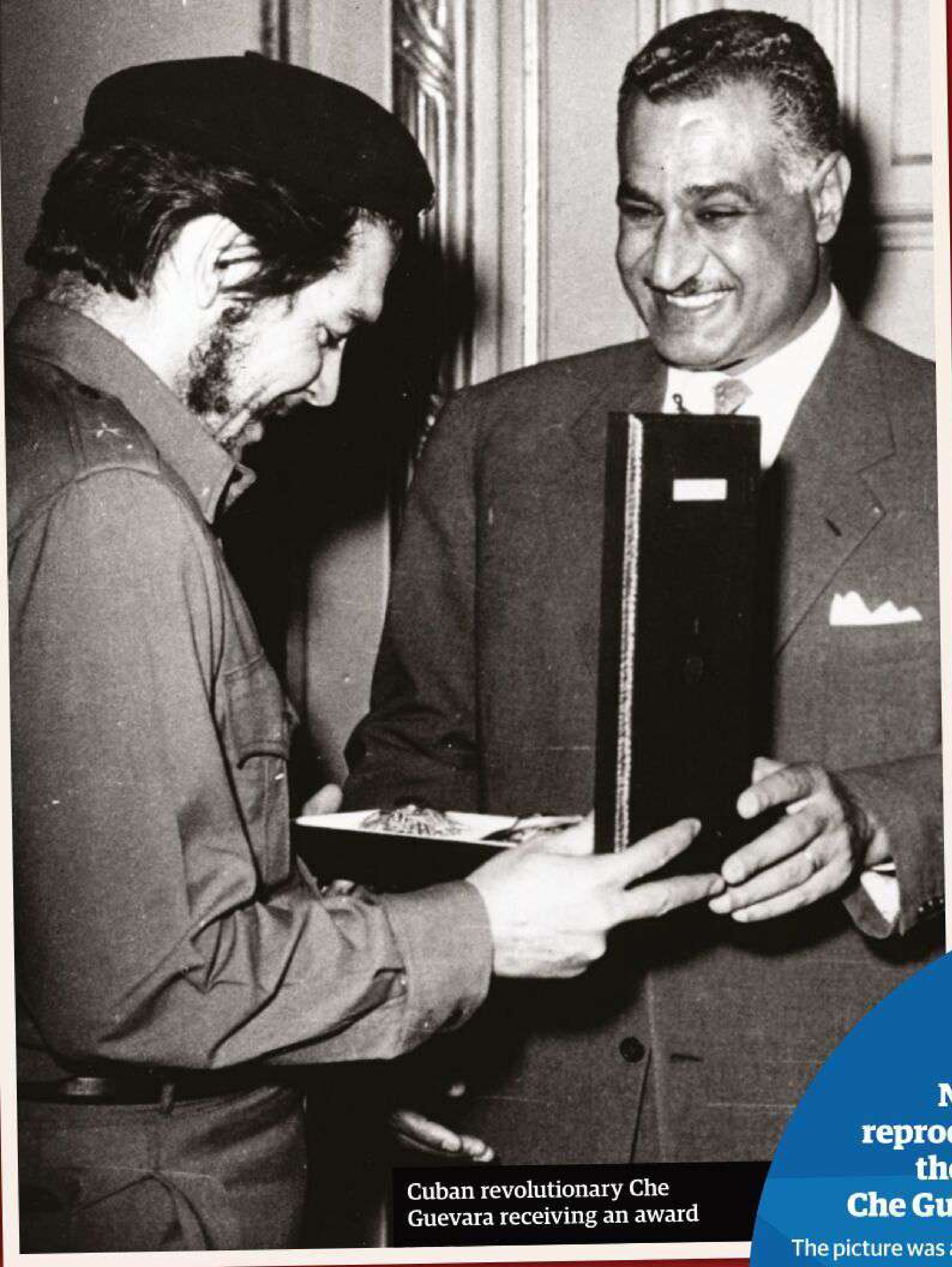
Several of the Cuban exiles that Hilda and Ernesto had encountered in Guatemala had gone to Mexico too. Fidel and his brother Raul had been granted an amnesty in Cuba. When they joined their fellow exiles in Mexico, the paths of the Castro brothers and Ernesto crossed. At length, Fidel outlined his plan to land a small guerrilla force by boat on Cuba to begin a revolution there. Won over by the charismatic leader who echoed many of Ernesto's own thoughts, he agreed to join the rebel invasion.

Shortly after, Hilda became pregnant and the pair married, but none of that lessened his commitment to the cause. Nicknamed 'Che' by the Cubans – because he used that Argentine word roughly meaning 'mate' or 'pal' in much of his speech – Hilda's husband was principally the group's medic. Yet Che took part in all aspects of military training, eager to prove himself. He was declared "the best guerrilla of them all" by Alberto Bayo, a veteran of the Spanish Civil War who was instructing them.

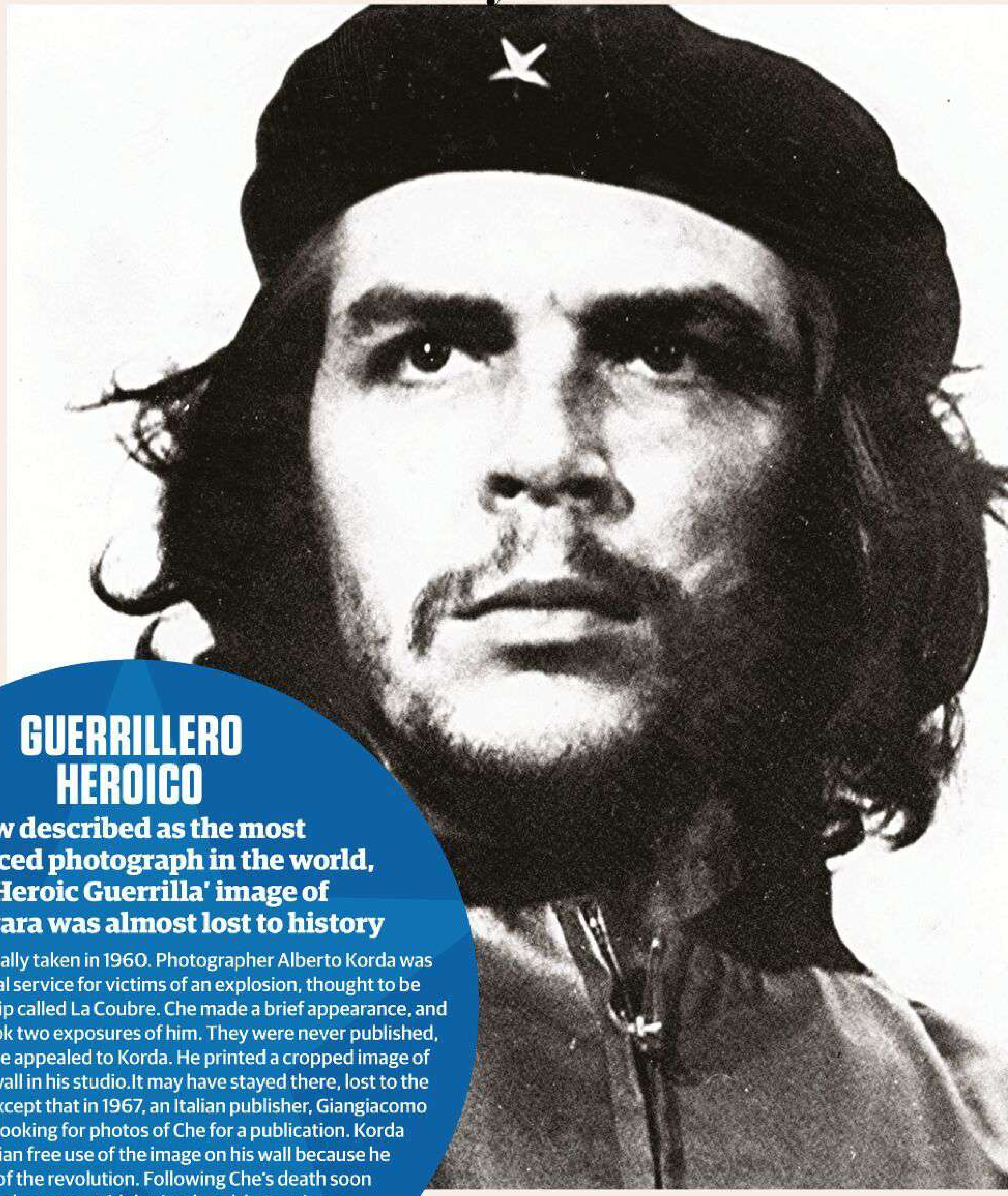
A force of 82 men squeezed on board a motor launch called Granma when it left Mexico on 25 November 1956. The craft had seen better days. Laden with weapons and equipment, and battling against heavy weather, it took seven days to reach Cuba. Once there, the launch hit a sandbar off the coast. The men had to carry what they could ashore, wading through dense mangrove and thorny bushes. "It was a shipwreck rather than a landing," Che wrote later. Worse, the group quickly came under attack from the Cuban army.

In another brush with death, Che was shot in the neck. Losing a lot of blood, he thought he was going to die, but was pulled to relative safety by the other fighters. In the chaos and confusion, many of the men were killed, others captured and executed. Those that remained alive were scattered across the region.

# *Che Guevara: Martyr or murderer?*



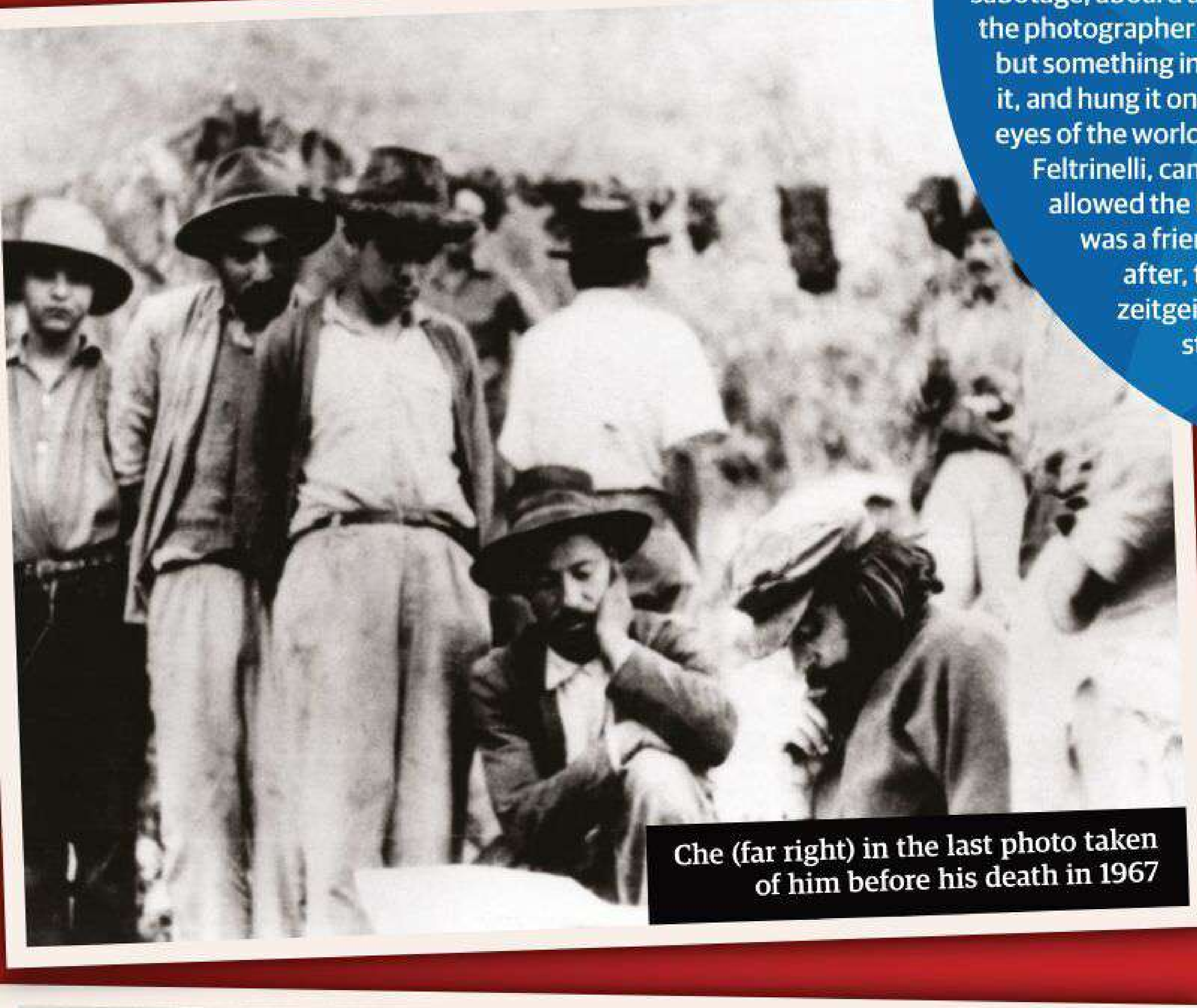
Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara receiving an award



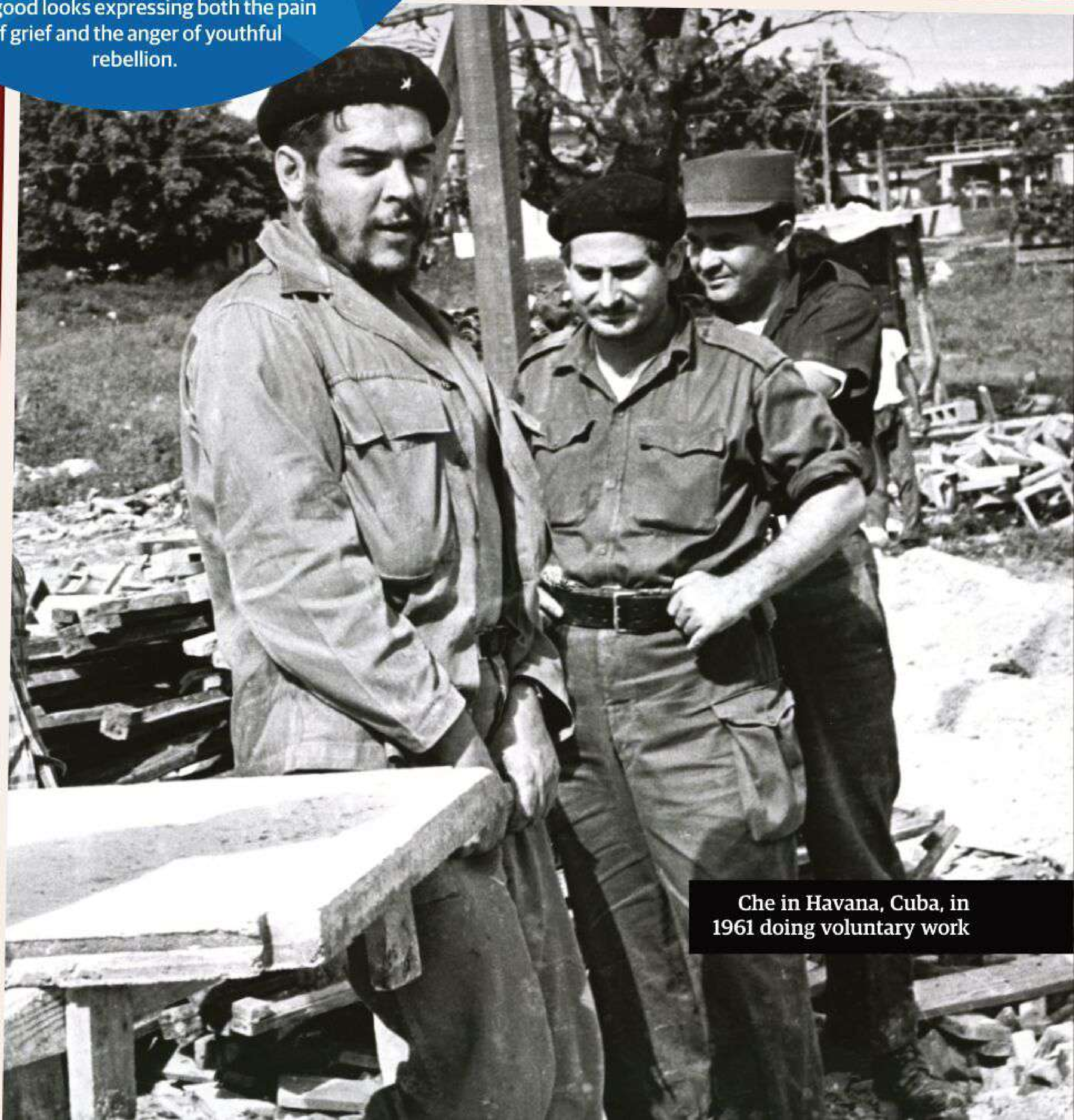
## GUERRILLERO HEROICO

### Now described as the most reproduced photograph in the world, the 'Heroic Guerrilla' image of Che Guevara was almost lost to history

The picture was actually taken in 1960. Photographer Alberto Korda was covering a memorial service for victims of an explosion, thought to be sabotage, aboard a ship called La Coubre. Che made a brief appearance, and the photographer took two exposures of him. They were never published, but something in one appealed to Korda. He printed a cropped image of it, and hung it on a wall in his studio.It may have stayed there, lost to the eyes of the world, except that in 1967, an Italian publisher, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, came looking for photos of Che for a publication. Korda allowed the Italian free use of the image on his wall because he was a friend of the revolution. Following Che's death soon after, the photo was widely circulated, becoming a zeitgeist icon – an executed revolutionary with rock star good looks expressing both the pain of grief and the anger of youthful rebellion.



Che (far right) in the last photo taken of him before his death in 1967



Che in Havana, Cuba, in 1961 doing voluntary work

# ONE MAN'S FREEDOM FIGHTER IS ANOTHER MAN'S TERRORIST

Weighing up the good against the bad of Che Guevara – a man of extremes

### THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

Journeying through Latin America, Che observed for himself the problems faced by the vast majority of the region's people. His analysis that this was caused by colonialism and exploitation, largely by corporations of the United States, was devastatingly accurate.

### EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION

The local recruits joining the rebels in Sierra Maestra were often illiterate. Che organised classes to teach them to read and write. Subsequently, the literacy campaign in Cuba that began after the revolution was one of his favourite initiatives.

### MEDIC!

As a doctor, Che treated leprosy victims in Peru, people injured during the overthrow of Guatemala's government, rebels under Castro's command, the local population in the Sierra Maestra – and even wounded Batista soldiers after a raid on the El Uvero garrison.

### A REVOLUTION OF THE SELF

Che developed and lived by the concept of the New Man as the way to true socialism. The New Man didn't work for material goods, but had a selfless moral duty to work for society, which in turn nurtured him and his family.

### UNSHAKEABLE INTEGRITY

Many men have ideals, few will die for them as Che did. He lived by the words he wrote to his children in a final letter, wanting them to feel deeply any injustice committed against any person anywhere in the world.

**GOOD**

### REVOLUTIONARY JUSTICE

Numbers are disputed, but certainly hundreds were executed at Che's La Cabaña tribunals. The final decision was his, and he didn't let political or humanitarian pleas affect it. To Che, enemies of the revolution had no place in the new Cuba.

### THE ENEMY IN THE NORTH

The dislike and distrust that Che felt for the United States as colonialist exploiters ran very deep. It can be compared to the hatred developed by Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda and other religious fundamentalist terrorist groups.

### CUBAN MISSILES

To protect the revolution, even nuclear Armageddon wasn't out of the question. After the Cuban Missile Crisis, Che informed reporter Sam Russell that, fearing invasion, had the missiles been under Cuban control, they would have launched them against the United States.

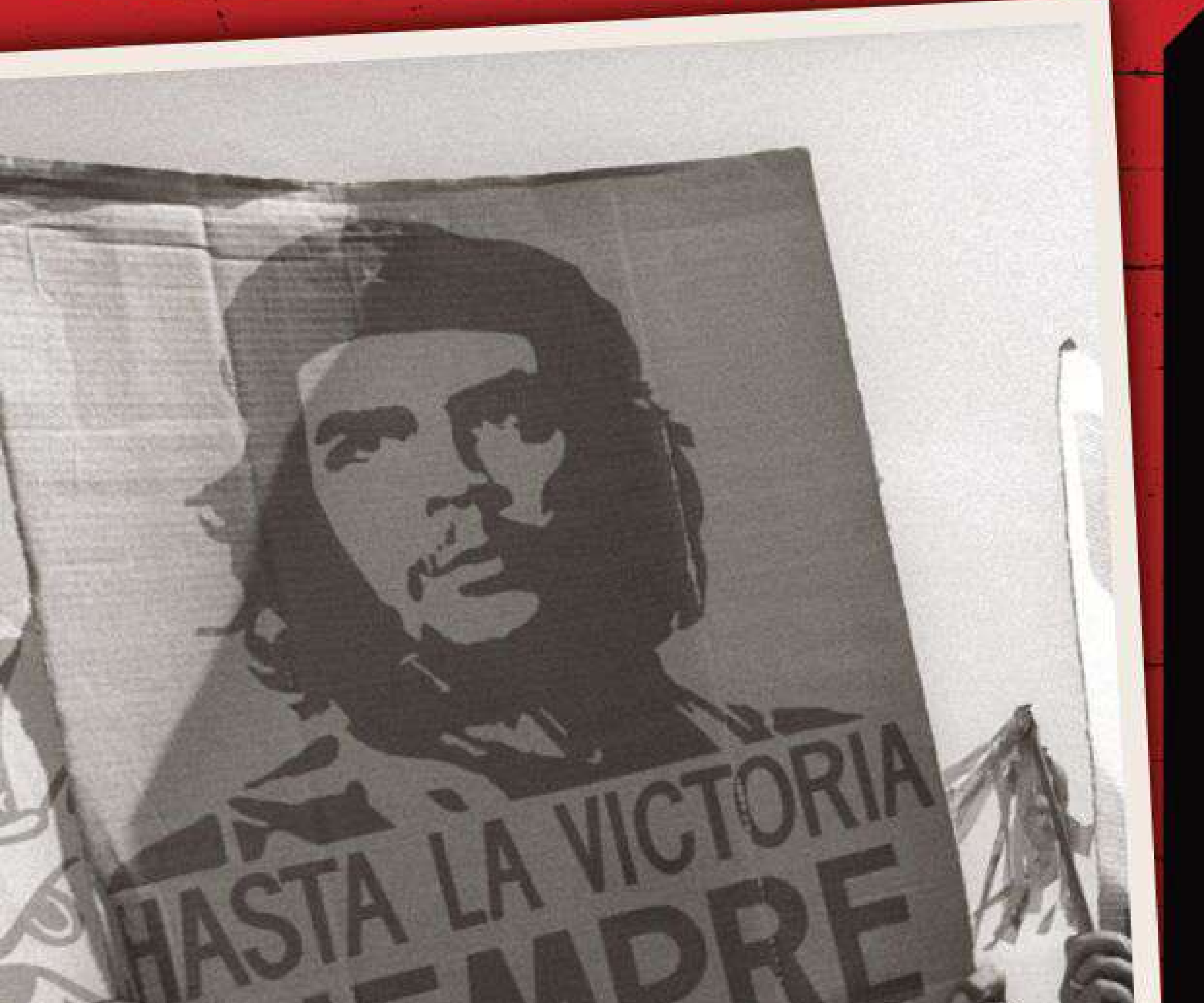
### EXECUTIONER

Castro had ordered the execution of Eutimio Guerra, who had betrayed the rebels' movements to the army. Dispassionately, Che stepped forward and put a bullet into the spy's brain, later detailing the incident in his diary with chilling detachment.

### WARMONGER

As a Marxist, Che was an enemy of democracy. His advocacy of guerrilla warfare, in his own words calling for "two, three… many Vietnams," led untold numbers of young, idealistic Latin Americans to lose their lives in futile rebellions.

**BAD**



Slowly, the surviving guerrillas found each other and hid out in the Sierra Maestra mountains. Their exact number is disputed but it was less than 25. Over time, with the help of sympathetic locals and other Cubans keen to end Batista's hated regime, the rebels acquired recruits and weapons. Che became masterful at organising hit-and-run attacks against the army, inflicting damage then fading back into the countryside before any counter-attacks. His work impressed Fidel, who gave him command of a second force.

Che organised his men to help locals learn to read and write while offering medical care himself. He was a stern disciplinarian, but as an excellent strategist who invariably led from the front, morale within his group was high. His men were always ready to lay down their lives for their leader and their cause.

After a failed offensive by Batista's army, the guerrillas struck out across the country. Fidel's force headed towards Santiago, Cuba's second city, while Che's group went towards Santa Clara. The battle for Santa Clara proved decisive. Just hours after the city fell to the rebels, Batista fled the country. Che's men marched on Havana and took the capital unopposed. It had taken just over two years for guerrillas numbering little more than 20 at one point to claim the country.

Next, they had to keep it. Che was put in charge of La Cabaña prison, where revolutionary justice was swiftly and ruthlessly administered to Batista's torturers and war criminals, to traitors, and to enemies of the revolution. Defendants were allowed witnesses and lawyers, but there were no juries. Che selected judges and reviewed numerous cases with them, though as chief prosecutor, his decision was final. Hundreds were executed by firing squad on his order. The lack of firmness he'd witnessed first-hand in Guatemala was not going to be repeated.

He was equally uncompromising in his private life. When Hilda arrived in Cuba with their three-year-old daughter, Che bluntly informed her that he had fallen in love with Aleida March, who had fought alongside him. Che and Hilda divorced quickly. He married Aleida, and had four more children with her.

However, neither they nor Cuba, where he was granted citizenship, could fully capture his heart. Che's over-riding commitment, now that he had successfully fought one, was to revolution.

After holding various government posts over several years, Che wrote a "farewell letter" that Fidel revealed to the Cuban people in October 1965. In it, Che declared his intention to leave the country to fight for the revolutionary cause abroad. By that time, he was already in Africa, working with elite Cuban fighters training Marxist rebels in the Congo.

It was thought that the guerrilla tactics used successfully in Cuba could be repeated to bring about a communist state in central Africa. However, Che found the rebels to be poorly disciplined and badly led. They also encountered fierce opposition from South African mercenaries flown in to aid the Congo National Army. Suffering from dysentery and, inevitably, acute asthma attacks, Che was forced to abandon the mission.

To recover, he lived incognito in Dar es Salaam and Prague. He made a final secret visit to Cuba to see his family and Fidel, then, shaving off his beard and most of his hair in order to pose as an unremarkable Uruguayan businessman, he flew to Bolivia.

In the rural south east of the country, he met up with a group of about 50 guerrillas. They had some initial success in skirmishes with what was thought to be a poorly trained and equipped Bolivian army. Yet the local population steadfastly refused to rise up and join them in revolution, and their opponents were in fact being aided by the CIA and US Special Forces. Quickly picked off by their opponents, the guerrilla numbers dwindled while the net around them tightened.

In October 1967, with morale low and his men fatigued, Che's group were near the village of La Higuera. The Bolivian Army trapped them in a ravine, and the firefight that led to Che's capture began. It was his final brush with death.

## CHE'S FINAL HOURS

### 7, 8, 9 October 1967

**The Bolivia campaign has gone badly. The peasants refuse to rise up. Che has 16 men left…**

★ Exhausted, hungry and in some cases sick, the ragtag gang of guerrillas led by Che are in a steep, jungle-clad ravine near a small village, La Higuera.

★ They encounter a peasant woman herding goats. They ask if she has seen soldiers but get no clear answer. They give her some money, hoping she won't reveal their position.

★ A company of Bolivian army rangers receive information that there are guerrillas nearby. They sweep into the area, taking up positions on both sides of the ravine.

★ The rangers are spotted. Che divides his men into three, the likelihood being that they'll have to shoot their way out. They hold their fire and positions for several tense hours.

★ Just after 1pm some guerrillas are detected. A fierce firefight begins. Che's M-2 carbine rifle is hit in the barrel, rendering it useless. His pistol is empty.

★ Che is shot in the leg. As rangers close in he reportedly yells: "Don't shoot! I am Che Guevara. I am worth more to you alive than dead!"

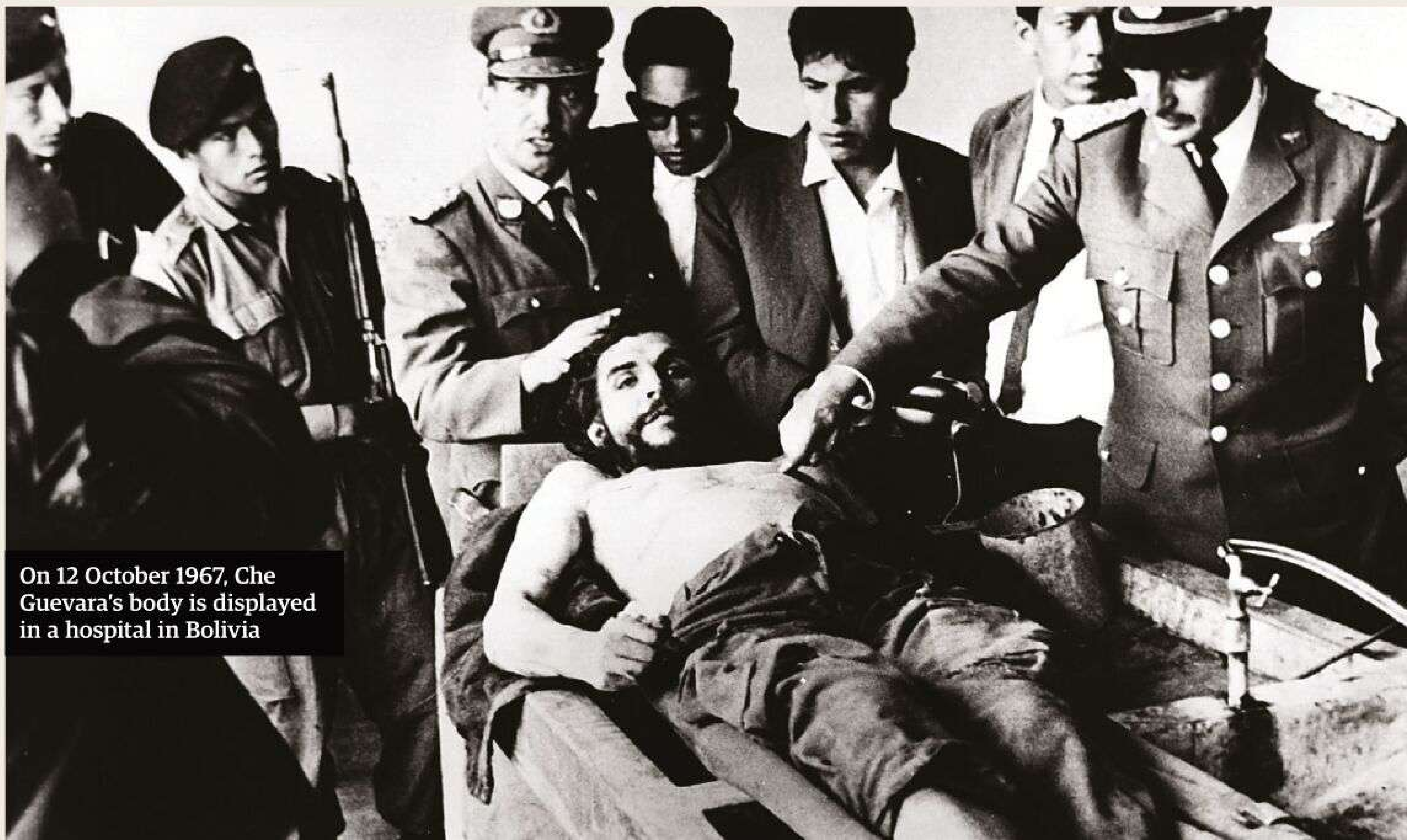
★ The captured Che, unable to walk, is carried away from the area to a one-room schoolhouse at La Higuera. Bound hand and foot, he is held overnight.

★ Félix Rodríguez, a CIA operative working with the Bolivians, arrives early next morning. He is startled by Che's bedraggled appearance. They talk and Rodríguez has a photo taken with him.

★ Despite the United States hoping to keep Che alive, the Bolivian government orders his execution. Rodríguez informs Che of his fate. Sergeant Terán volunteers for the task. Che is killed.

★ His hands are amputated and chemically preserved for identification purposes. He is buried with other guerrillas in a mass grave. Years later it is discovered. Che's remains are now in Cuba.

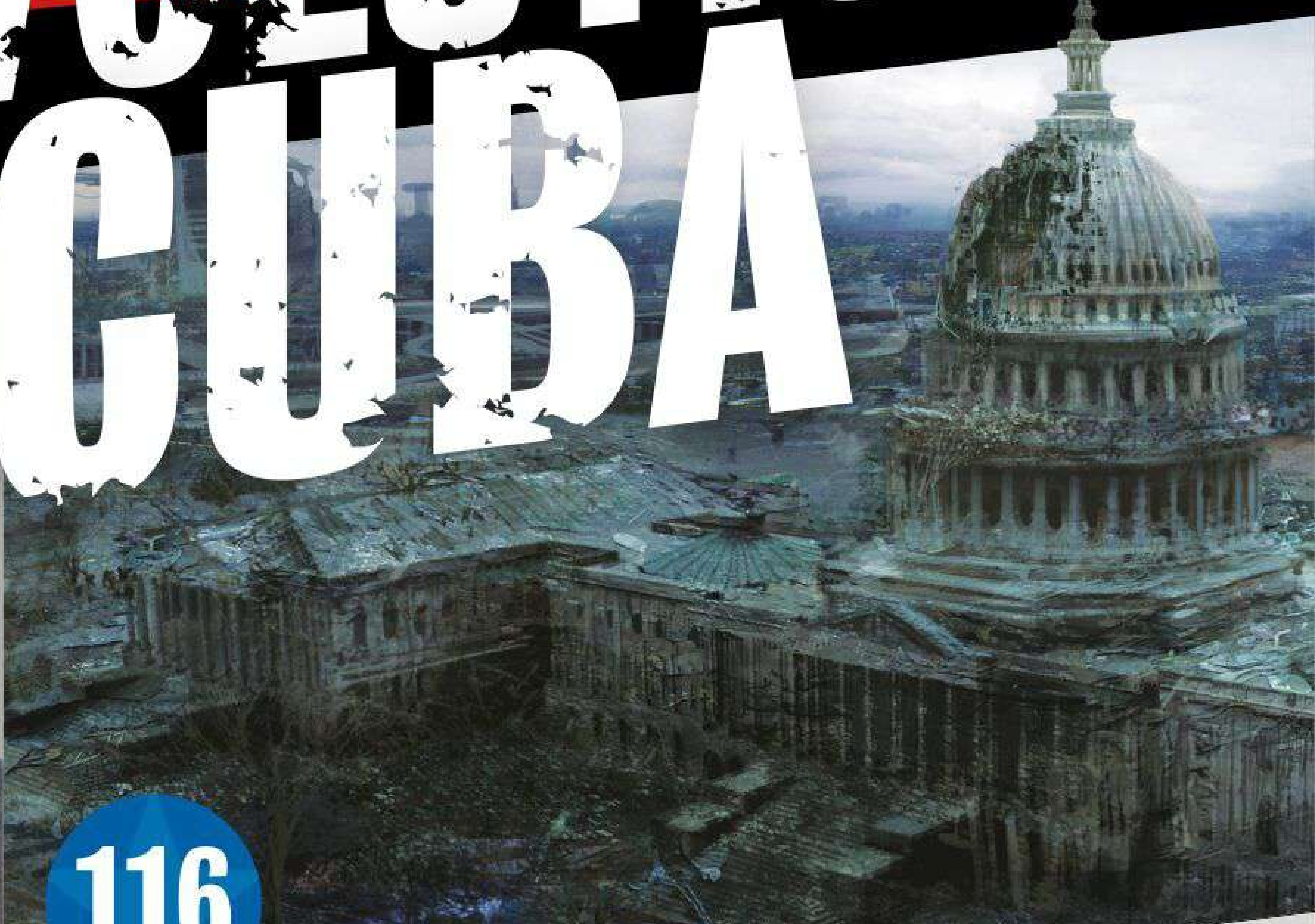
© Alamy, Getty Images

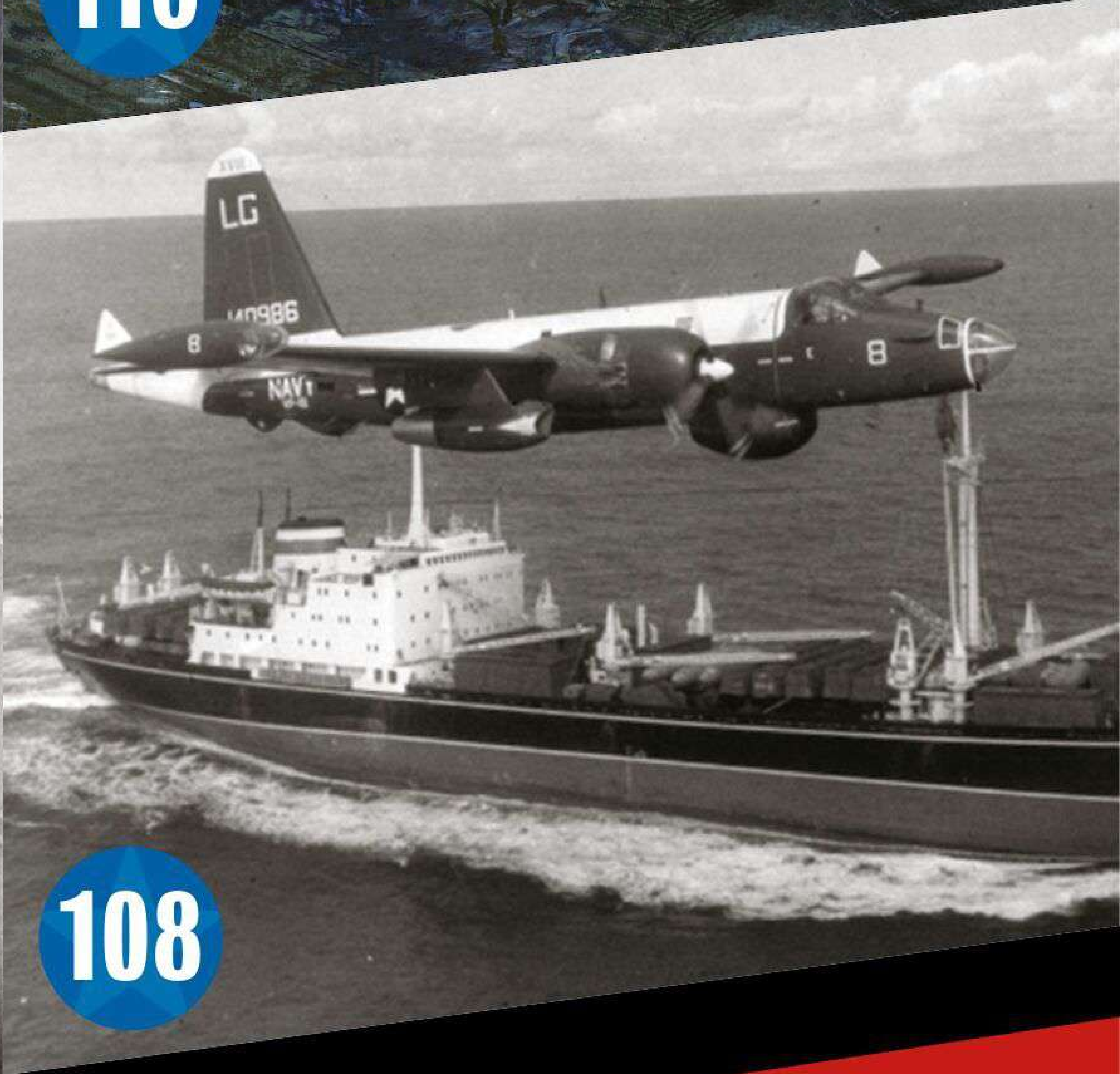


On 12 October 1967, Che Guevara's body is displayed in a hospital in Bolivia

Fidel Castro, after arriving in Havana, looks out over the city from a balcony at the Hilton Hotel. All press events would take place at the hotel and the Soviet embassy was set up across two floors. When Castro arrived in Havana he took the hotel as his headquarters and stayed in room 2324 – the Continental Suite.

# POST-REVOLUTION CUBA

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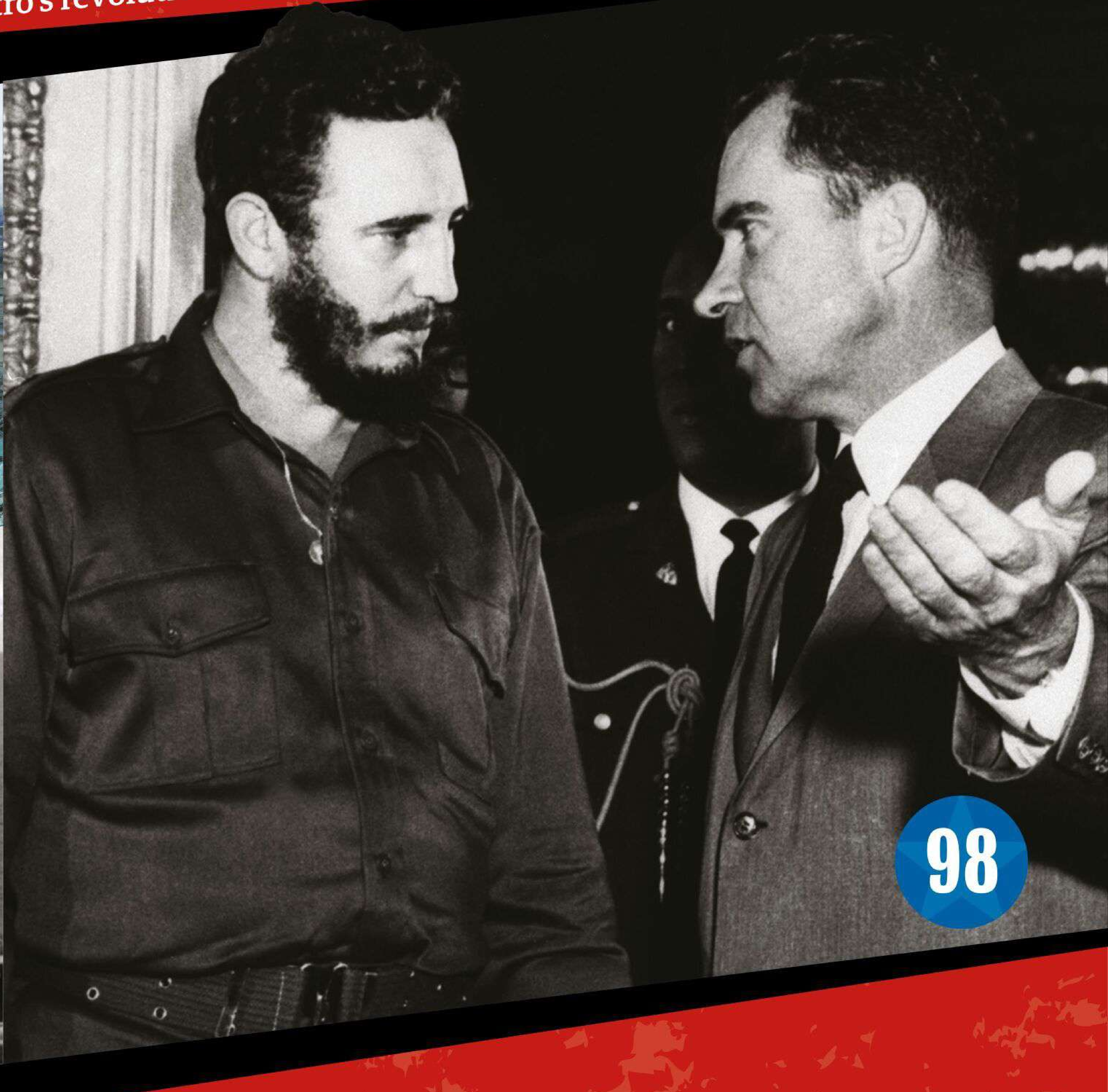
**98** **AFTER THE REVOLUTION**
Castro's rise to power had repercussions that were felt not only throughout Latin America, but across the entire globe

How Castro's revolution shaped Cuba in the decades that followed



**104 DISASTER IN THE BAY OF PIGS**
When the US decided that it had to topple Fidel Castro, it turned to disgruntled Cuban exiles. The result was nothing short of a debacle

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At the height of the Cold War, Cuba became the fulcrum of a deadly face-off between the Soviet Union and the United States

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From World War III to nuclear obliteration, discover what might have been if the Cuban Missile Crisis had escalated

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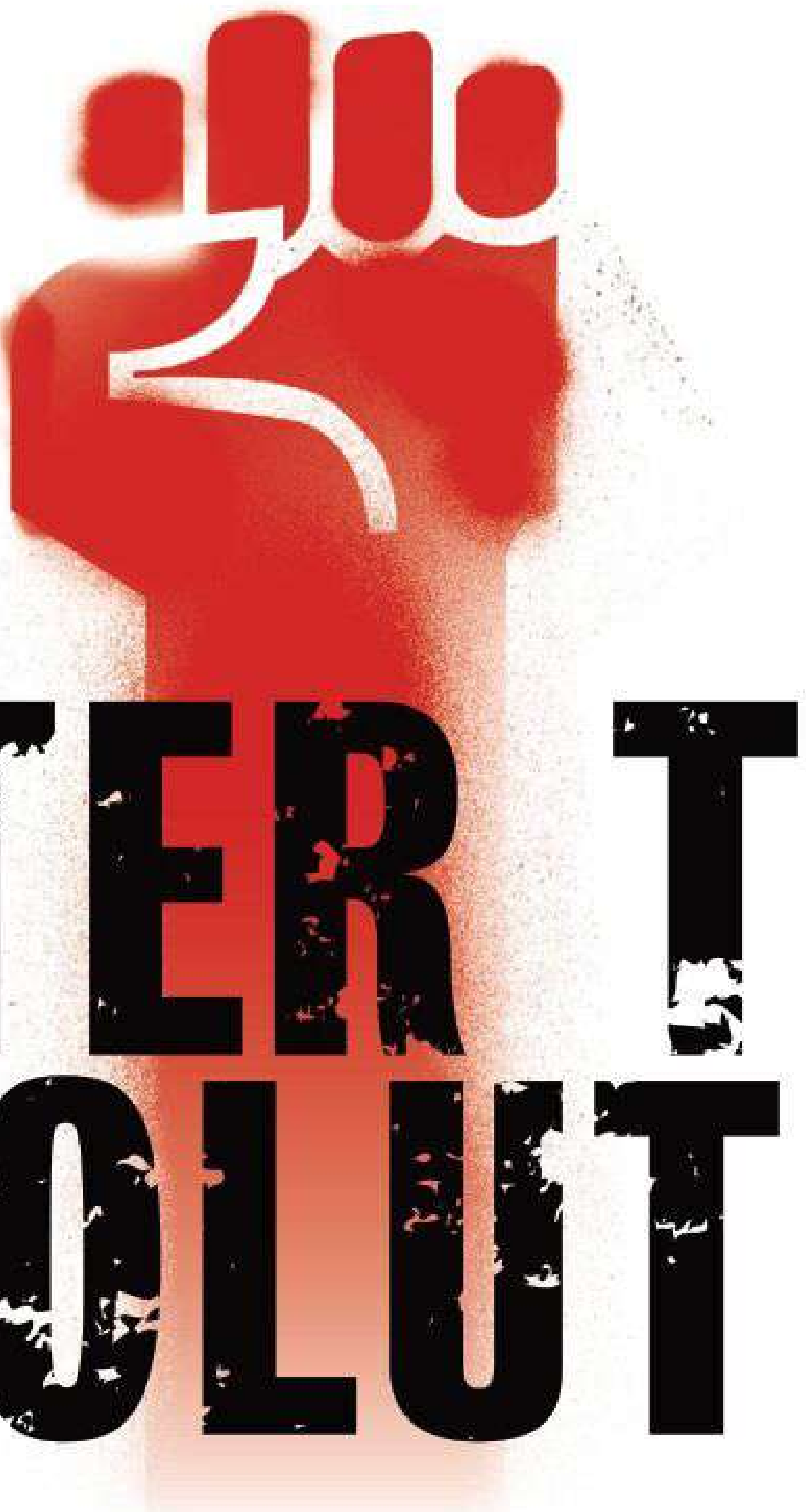
Post-revolution Cuba has courted friendship where possible, but has never been afraid to strike out on its own



# AFTER THE REVOLUTION

Castro's rise to power had repercussions that were felt not only throughout Latin America, but across the entire globe

Written by
**DAVID SMITH**

Revolution was not a new phenomenon in Latin America, but the Cuban version was very different to the more restrained affairs of the previous century. Countries such as Argentina and Venezuela had seen revolutions to remove political elites, but little had changed in terms of the social structures of the countries. For the most part, revolution was undertaken by educated, politically active groups rather than common citizens. A 19th century peasant farmer, in fact, may have been unaware that a revolution had even taken place in his own country.

Much had changed by the middle of the 20th century. Radio and, increasingly, television, made it easier for news to travel and reach remoter parts of a country as well as the wider world. Following the Cuban Revolution, riots took place in Uruguay between pro- and anti-Castro factions – people who would probably never have heard of events thousands of kilometres away a century earlier.

Often lost in the focus on the great East-West power struggle that was taking shape at the time is the impact the Cuban Revolution had on Latin America. The response was mixed. Among the general populations there was strong support for Castro, but among the ruling classes there was concern – all establishments tend to be fearful of a revolutionary wind blowing its way through their own backyard.

The role of the United States in the equation complicated matters. Although essential throughout the region economically, and even relied on for defence, America was also seen as high-handed. The populations of Latin America felt resentment at the superior attitude of the Americans and there was satisfaction in seeing Castro thumb his nose at them. As American hostility towards Castro became stronger and more overt, it only elevated him in the eyes of much of the region. He was daring, and he was getting away with it.

> "Latin America felt resentment at the attitude of the Americans and there was satisfaction at seeing Castro thumb his nose at them"

## A NEW ORDER

Cuba had been a fairly robust state prior to the revolution. Healthcare in particular was good, but it was patchy. Rural regions were usually left far behind in terms of hospitals and doctors. The situation was the same with schools, as thousands in the countryside had no education whatsoever.

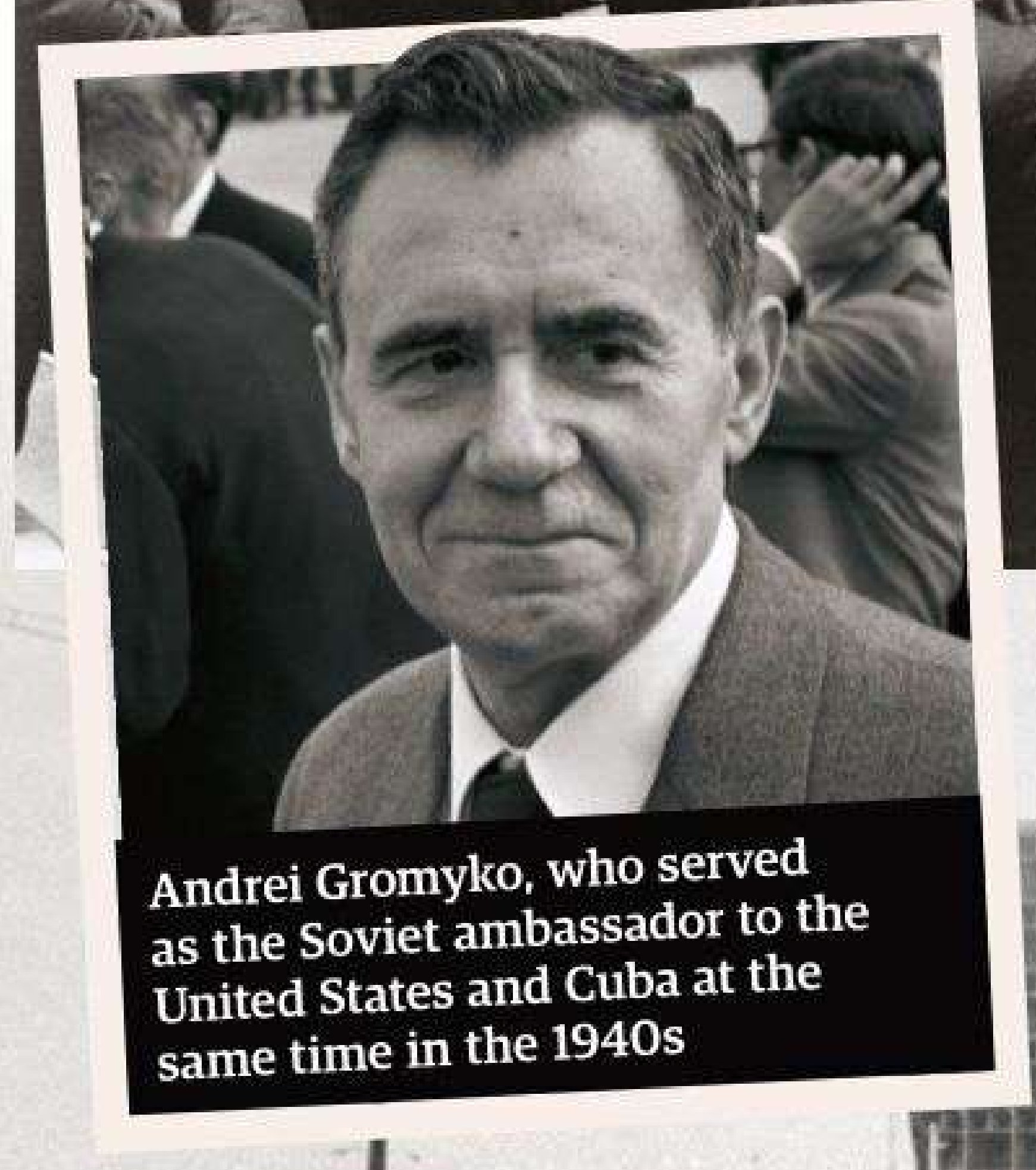
The revolution, like the people who fronted it, was seen as young and energetic. This made it exciting, a neat antidote to the stuffiness of the established order of the post-war years. Where old hands from World War II still gripped the reins in many of the world's leading nations, Cuba now had a new generation in charge. As the old European

President Eisenhower's snub of Castro in 1959 was calculated. While the Cuban leader met with Vice President Richard Nixon, Eisenhower played golf

Nixon and Castro in 1959, in a meeting that set the tone for US-Cuban relations

Philip Bonsal (centre) arrives at Havana airport to take up his duties as the US ambassador to Cuba

Castro attends the United Nations General Assembly in 1960, shortly after making the 'First Declaration of Havana'


Andrei Gromyko, who served as the Soviet ambassador to the United States and Cuba at the same time in the 1940s

empires crumbled, and as the United States stepped into a period of growing turmoil and civil unrest, the Cuban Revolution seemed perfectly timed to sweep away the old ways.

Obviously, the desire to get rid of Batista had been a major driving force, and there was a sense that whatever came next would be preferable. This, together with a feeling that a new era in global history was being ushered in, resulted in an atmosphere of optimism in Cuba.

Not everyone shared this optimism, though. Some warned that the revolution itself could veer towards dictatorship if counter-revolutionary fears became strong enough. Others had doubts, but wanted to give the new regime a chance to show what it could do. Protests against America's increasing hostility to the Castro regime erupted across America and Fair Play for Cuba committees were set up in several cities.

When attending the 1960 UN General Assembly, Castro stayed at the Hotel Theresa in Harlem, the first foreign leader to stay in the predominantly black neighbourhood

America's attitude had initially been cool, but not necessarily dismissive. Castro visited Washington, DC in 1959 but President Eisenhower chose not to meet with him, leaving that job to the vice president, Richard Nixon. Nixon emerged from his talk with Castro shaken and concerned that the communists were likely to take a grip of Cuba. Castro, in the eyes of Nixon, was too naïve to rule his nation effectively.

Fears of communist influence in Cuba, and its spread throughout Latin America, had been prominent since the start of the revolution. By the time Castro met with Nixon, the United States was already looking at its options if the time came to replace the new Cuban leader.

The interests of American businesses kept the situation under control for a while. Optimistic that they could come to a working arrangement with Castro's Cuba, they were given time to explore opportunities and for a brief period there seemed to be hope. On 7 January 1959, America formally recognised the new government and sent out a new ambassador. Philip Bonsal was a considerate choice, as he had no unpalatable ties with the previous regime but had experience of working at the embassy in Havana.

These were tentative steps, but they seemed to hint at the possibility of normalised relations between the two countries. In reality, this was never likely. There was a fundamental difference of interpretation when it came to the nations' shared histories. Eisenhower, grumbling about the new regime and its attitude to America, complained that "here is a country that you would believe, on the basis of our history, would be one of our real friends".

This misplaced sense of betrayal coloured American thinking on the situation. At a meeting of the National Security Council, in June 1959, it was decided that America could not work with the Castro regime. He would need to be replaced with 'a new government favourable to US interests'.

There had been no real honeymoon period between America and Castro, only one of wary politeness, and that had now come to an end. There was still a willingness to give American businesses more time to thrash out a workable relationship with Cuba, but by the end of the year that seemed impossible and active planning to remove Castro began.

## THE SOVIET OPTION

Castro had not exactly run into the arms of the Soviets, but America's initial coolness and rapidly developing hostility helped to push him in that direction. Like America, Russia had officially recognised the Castro regime in January 1959, but diplomatic relations had not been established (and would not be until May 1960).

This was not surprising, considering Russia's general apathy regarding Latin America. A Russian

Latin American nations often felt belittled by America, but still referred to the country as the 'Great Brother of the North'

Tractors awaiting delivery to Cuban farmers as part of the country's land reforms

embassy had only been established in Cuba in 1943 and even then the ambassador pulled double duty as the ambassador to the United States as well. It was not difficult to see which of the two roles would take precedence and, in fact, Andrei Gromyko never visited Cuba.

Following the revolution, Russia suddenly found itself with a potential ally just 144 kilometres (90 miles) off the coast of the United States. This was obviously intriguing, but it would be economic needs that drove the relationship to start with. Cuba needed a market for its sugar and Castro's land reforms had alienated the nation's biggest buyer – it was not certain how long the Americans could be counted on to keep buying the quota they had signed up for.

Che Guevara had taken over the running of the Cuban economy. Lacking in formal training he nevertheless recognised the country's dangerous reliance on sugar exports and wanted to diversify. For now, sugar was the major piece of the Cuban economy, but that had to change.

Touring mostly third-world countries in June 1959, Guevara made contact with the Russians at their embassy in Egypt. The following month the Russians signed a deal to buy half a million tons of Cuban sugar. A Soviet exposition then visited Cuba in February 1960. Cubans were waking up to the possibilities of closer ties with the Russians at the same time as the Russians were waking up to their own opportunity.

The sugar deal was quickly ramped up to a million tons of sugar per year, over a five-year period. The only downside to the deal was that Russia would pay mostly in kind, through industrial goods including oil. Only a fifth of the cost of the sugar would be settled in cash, which tied Cuba's hands when it came to dealing with other nations.

## AMERICA BITES BACK

American hostility was already seeing it launch small-scale sabotage missions against Cuban sugar plantations and mills, which led to an escalation in the animosity between the two countries. Eisenhower was considering his options for action when the French ship La Coubre (illegally importing small arms from Belgium into Cuba) was blown up in the harbour at Havana on 4 March 1960.

The arrival of 300,000 tons of crude oil from Russia in April, the first payment-in-kind due from the Russian side of the sugar deal, increased tensions. Cuban-based oil refineries owned by American companies including Texaco, Standard Oil and Shell refused to refine it. Castro responded by seizing the companies' assets in Cuba.

The tit-for-tat escalation continued with the Americans threatening to pull out of their own commitment to buy Cuban sugar. Castro in turn threatened nationalisation of American assets in Cuba, saying; "They will take away our quota pound by pound, and we will take away their sugar mills one by one".

Castro's refusal to be cowed by the Americans won him support among other Latin American nations, at least among the general populaces. Even governments needing to cooperate with America could derive a sly satisfaction from the insolence of this upstart regime in Cuba, which seemed unaware of its own vulnerability and determined to answer every American action with a bold action of its own.

Russia and China stepped in to offer support for the Cuban sugar industry, but things then took a decidedly sinister turn as the Russian premier, Nikita Khrushchev, grew increasingly enthusiastic about the possibilities of his new friend in Latin America. Khrushchev declared the Monroe Doctrine, which

## THE CUBAN LITERACY CAMPAIGN

### Teaching the country to read and write was one of the first priorities of the new regime

POR LA UNION DE TODOS LOS TRABAJADORES DEL MUNDO

Uniformed teachers carrying symbolic giant pencils parade through Havana during 'The Year of Education'

When Fidel Castro came to power, an estimated 40 per cent of the Cuban population was illiterate. The countryside especially was a black hole for education, often with no schools at all serving isolated rural communities.

Speaking at the United Nations in 1960, Castro vowed to eradicate illiteracy in his country within a year. There were raised eyebrows and probably a few quiet smiles at such an ambitious goal, but Castro had a plan. He declared 1961 to be 'The Year of Education'.

Using a former US military base, he started a programme that saw 100,000 new teachers trained and sent out into the country. Idealistic, fired with revolutionary fervour and energy, the teachers faced hardships. Counter-revolutionaries frequently attacked them and around 40 were actually killed. Despite the threats and attacks, however, they succeeded in teaching more than a million people to read and write. The uniformed teachers then encouraged their students to write thank-you letters to their leader, many of which are collected at a museum at the former military base.

The literacy campaign was to be the starting point for a continued commitment to the education of the Cuban people. Around 3,000 new schools were built and thousands of permanent teachers recruited. Hundreds of thousands of Cuban children were able to attend school for the first time, raising education standards in the country to levels unmatched through the rest of Latin America.

claimed America's right to control over the region, to be dead. All that remained now, he said, was to bury it.

On 6 August 1960, Castro nationalised US industries on the island, including oil, telephone and electricity companies. Sugar mills and their plantations shared the same fate. American banks were confiscated in September. Railways, cinemas and hotels soon followed. It was something like a declaration of war. Certainly it was one of open hostility, and any doubts were removed when Castro delivered what became known as the 'First Declaration of Havana' on 2 September.

"The people of Cuba," he stated, "strongly condemn the imperialisation of North America for its gross and criminal domination, lasting for more than a century, of all the people of Latin America." As shocking as those words were, more quickly followed. "Cuba accepts with gratitude the help of rockets from the Soviet Union," Castro continued, "should our territory be invaded by military forces of the United States."

Castro was gearing up for a confrontation with America, and he was bringing his big new friend along.

## THE EMBARGO

While America considered its options, chief of which was the rapid removal of Castro himself, economic measures would have to suffice. An embargo on exports to Cuba was established, which was to become the longest-running such embargo in history.

Russia and Eastern European nations stepped in to pick up the slack, committing to the purchase of four million tons of sugar per year. Whatever the initial intentions of the revolution might have been, it was now firmly hitched to the Soviet wagon.

Much would depend on how effectively Guevara was able to remodel the Cuban economy, and the

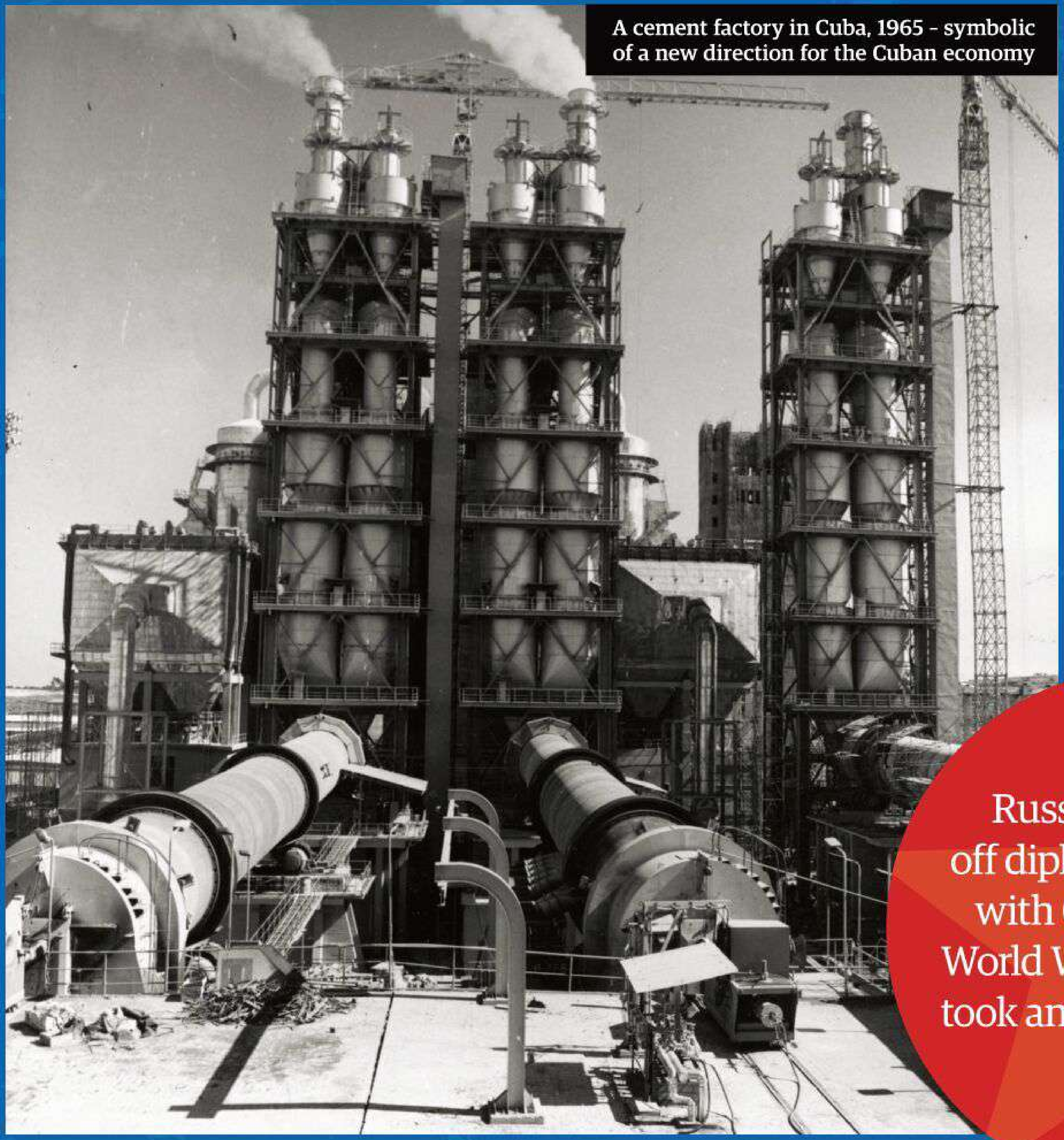
Russia had broken off diplomatic relations with Cuba following World War II when Cuba took an anti-communist position

EXPOSICIO
SOVIETIC

The Soviet Cultural Exposition reaches Cuba, with Soviet First Deputy Premier Anastas Mikoyan applauding its opening

## THE ECLA ECONOMISTS

Havana had to import the people necessary to transform its economy, and it knew just where to find them



A cement factory in Cuba, 1965 – symbolic of a new direction for the Cuban economy

Turning the Cuban economy around was a big enough task even before the talent drain that came with the revolution. With most Cuban economists having received their training in America, the new schemes proposed by Castro's regime seemed alien to them and the vast majority left for the States.

Che Guevara, given the monumental task of transforming the Cuban economy, needed new economists to help and turned to the Economic Commission for Latin America, a United Nations organisation. The ECLA offered a home for more free-thinking economists, those willing to look beyond the scope of the traditional Western economic models. The possibilities offered by Cuba, where radical theories could be implemented on an almost experimental basis, was too exciting to ignore and economists flooded into the country.

A period of 'euphoric planning' followed, and more bold claims were made, this time regarding the economy. Predictions of ten per cent economic growth each year were projected to give Cuba a standard of living to match that of European nations within ten years.

Unlike the predictions on educational advancements, however, those dealing with the Cuban economy proved unattainable. Reality would start to hit as early as 1962, when food rationing would be introduced. Part of the problem was the trade embargo imposed by the Americans, but the land redistribution had also played a part. Freed from the need to pay rent for their land, some peasant farmers also considered themselves freed from the need to produce much of anything. Transforming the economy would prove to be a far more difficult job than transforming the nation's educational system.

US embargo would bite deeply. It did not extend to medicines, but it most certainly did include spare parts for industrial machinery and, as American-made plants around the country began to break down, sourcing replacement parts was impossible. Instead, Russian machinery needed to be brought in, and it was greatly inferior. Clunky, relatively primitive and unfamiliar to the Cuban workforce, productivity took a hit as the transition was made to Russian technology.

Guevara had already recognised that Cuba needed to wean itself from its reliance on America, but the embargo made it an imperative. There was debate over how desirable (or possible) rapid change was, and many have commented that Cuba attempted to squeeze an industrial revolution into the span of a few years. A shortage of cash, due to Russia's insistence on paying for its sugar in kind, hampered the effort as well.

The economic problems imposed on Cuba from external forces would shape the country's development for decades, but a rather more immediate problem was brewing.

## THE COMMUNIST INFLUENCE

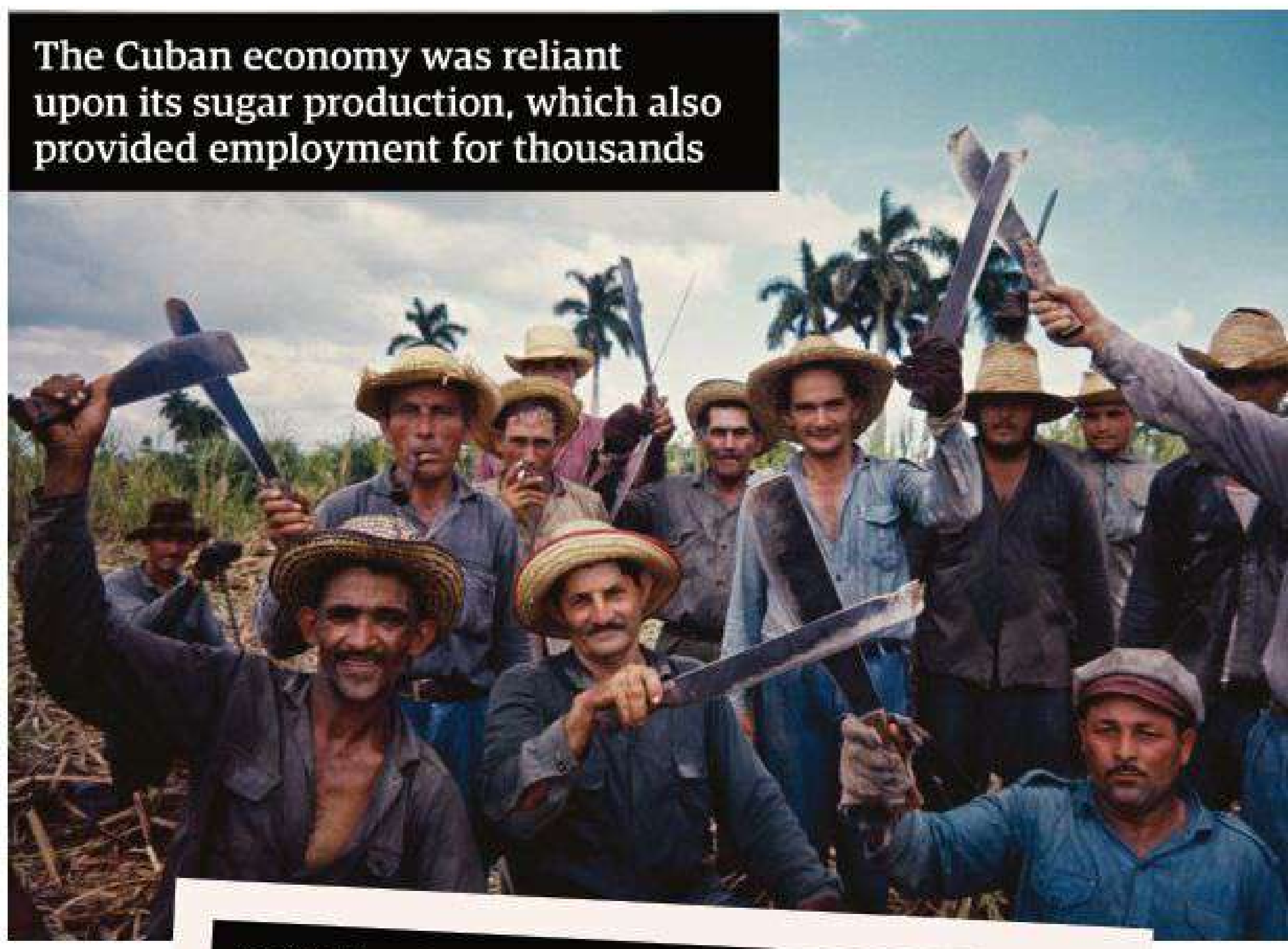
Cuba had already shown a warmer attitude towards the communist Chinese than any other Latin American country. At the 14th United Nations Assembly in 1959, the question of whether or not to debate the admission of China to the UN drew an abstention from Cuba, rather than the traditional call for postponement. The following year, at the 15th Assembly, Cuba went even further, voting to debate the question. The Cuban foreign minister, Raúl Roa García, declared it was absurd that, "the nation with the largest population in the world, a nation emancipated from exploitation and imperialist domination, should appear to be for 11 years represented by a government without authority, without territory, without sovereignty, and without people".

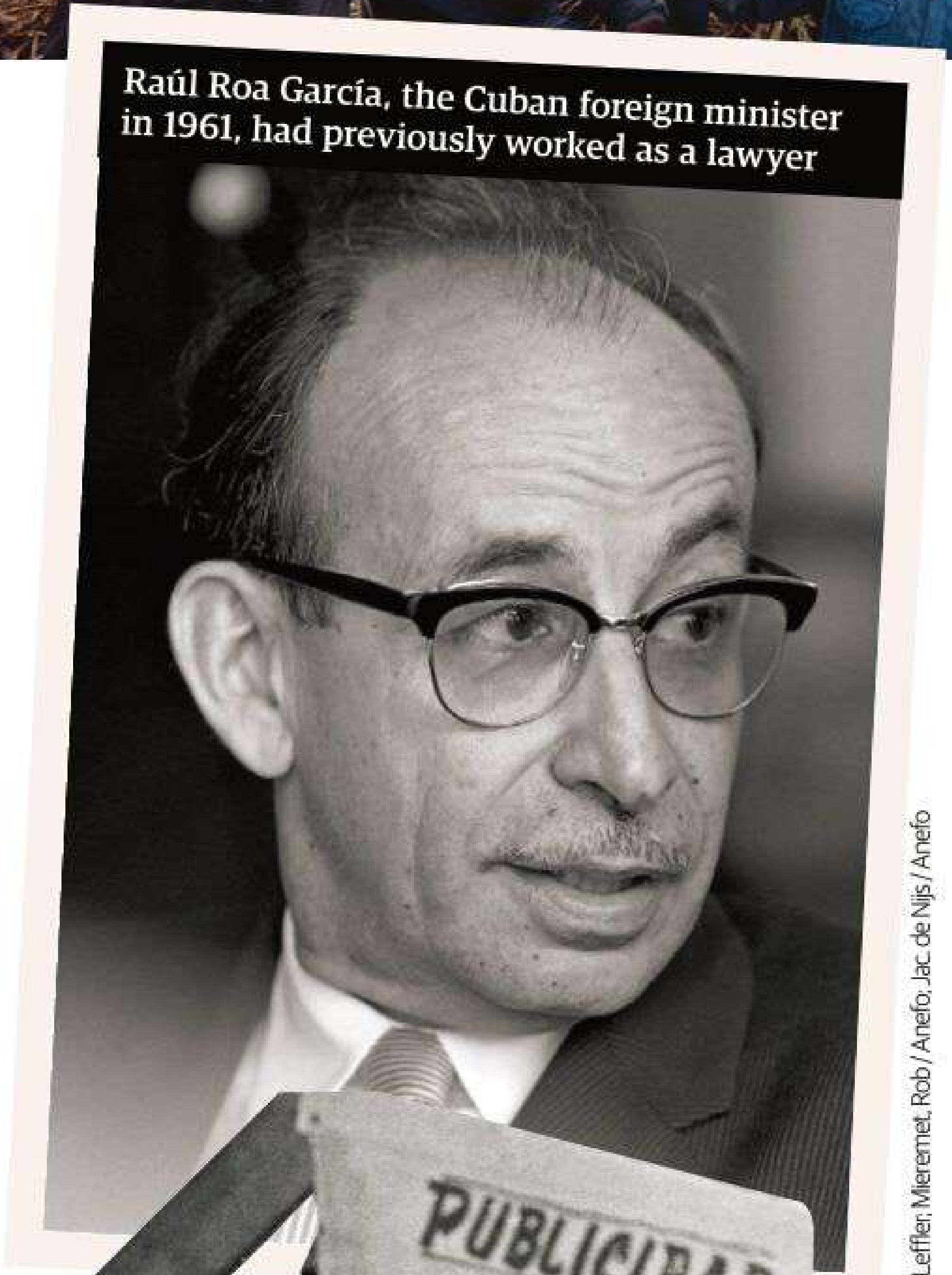
Cuba quickly aligned itself with Soviet interests in the UN, voting (uniquely among the Latin American nations) against a discussion on the situation in Hungary and supporting the Russian position on North Korea.

When trouble blew up in the Congo, Cuba consistently voted on resolutions in line with the Soviets and African nations and against the rest of the Western world. The image that Cuba sought to portray was that the struggle for independence from imperialist oppression in Africa was the same struggle that had played out in Cuba.

In fact, Cuba linked itself strongly to the continent in the year when 16 African nations had been admitted to the UN, prompting some to call 1960 'the Year of Africa'. Castro, in one lengthy speech, spoke in favour of the removal of foreign military bases from Ghana, stating: "If Africa is to be reborn… and to reawaken, then this formerly oppressed and exploited continent… must be preserved from the danger of destruction; it is our duty to preserve it".

In talking about the need to protect and defend Africa, Castro was drawing attention to his own country's need for protection and its impending fight for survival. This was not mere rhetoric, Castro was well aware of what was coming. The Americans had completed their plans to oust him from power and were ready to make their move.


The Cuban economy was reliant upon its sugar production, which also provided employment for thousands


Raúl Roa García, the Cuban foreign minister in 1961, had previously worked as a lawyer

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PUBLICIDAD
OSCAR
CUBA ACUSA
PATRIA
O MUERTE
LA COUBRE
RINID
INSCRIBASE
ó LLAME 3258
AIDA 23 JUNIO
PARTIDO SOCIALISTA POPULAR
LOS DIAMANTES DEL ROCK

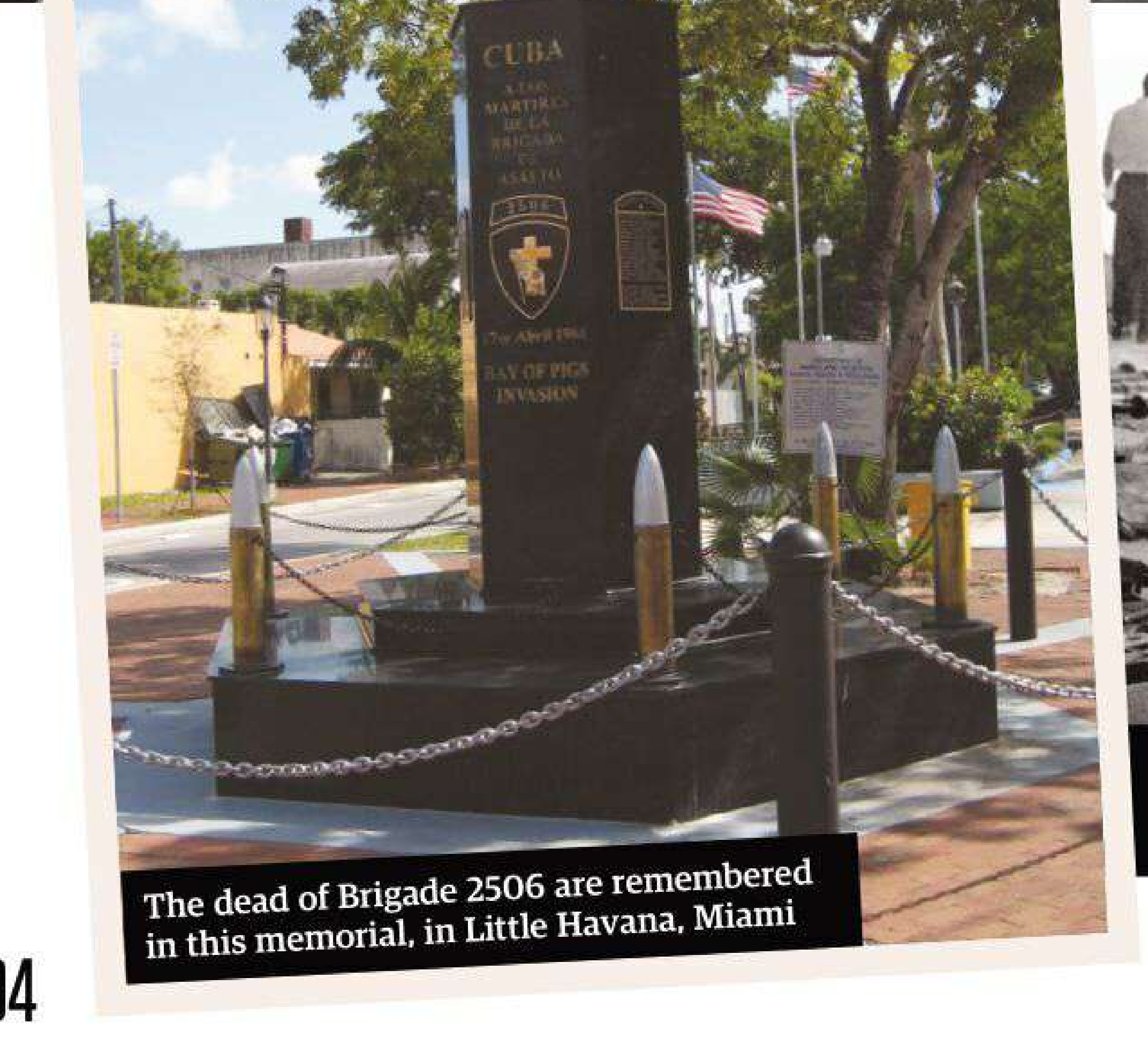
The most famous photograph of Che Guevara was taken at a remembrance ceremony following the sinking of La Coubre

A propaganda poster points an accusing finger at the United States over the sinking of La Coubre

> “Only major air strikes could save the invasion, but JFK was unwilling to authorise them”

While training, the men of Brigade 2506 were originally known as the ‘Cuban Expeditionary Force’

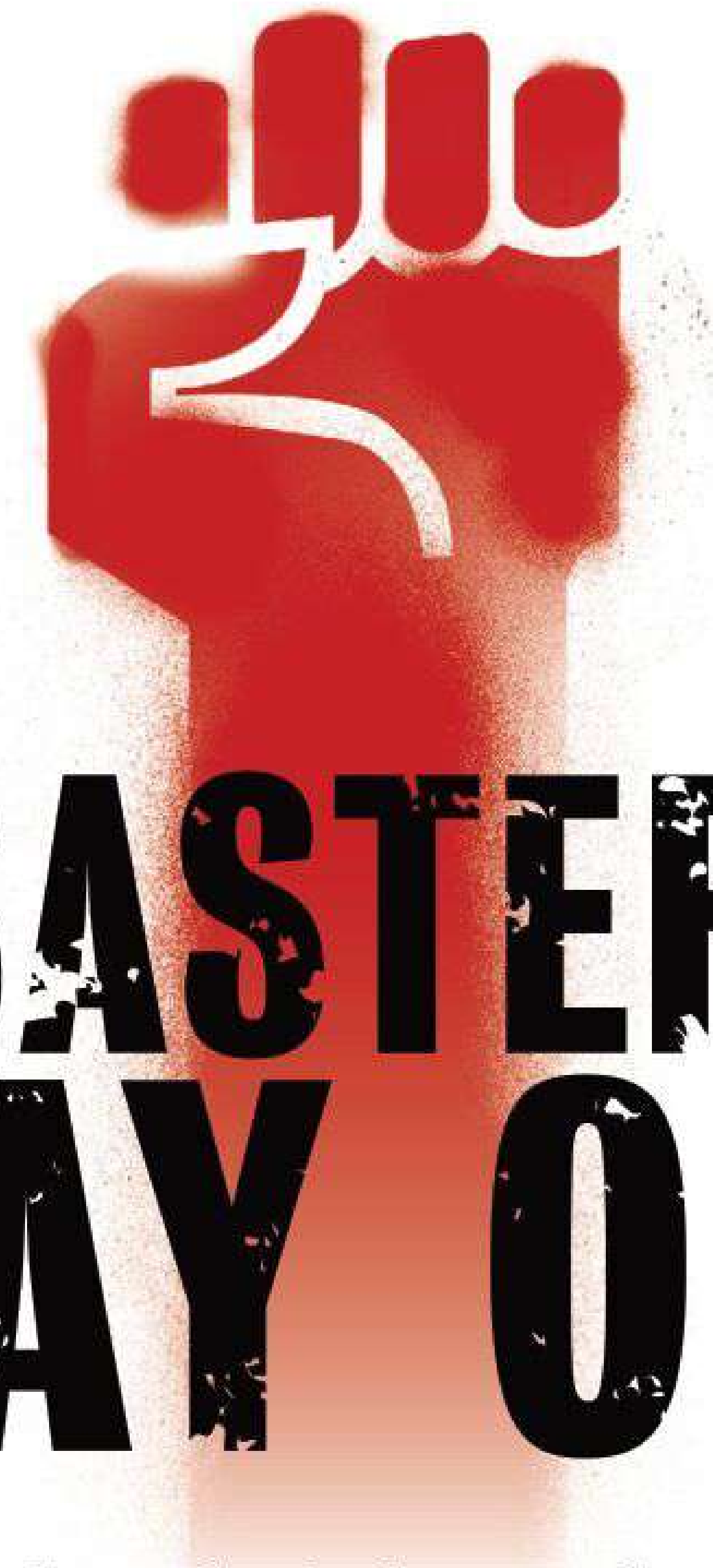
Cuban soldiers pose with one of the landing craft used at Playa Girón



The dead of Brigade 2506 are remembered in this memorial, in Little Havana, Miami

The brigadistas were well armed, but much of their weapons were lost at sea. The remainder fell into the hands of Castro’s forces

Cuban air defences would have stood little chance against concerted US airstrikes, but the Americans were keen to remain in the background as much as possible



# DISASTER IN THE BAY OF PIGS

When the United States decided that it had to topple Fidel Castro, it turned to disgruntled Cuban exiles to strike against him. The result was nothing short of a debacle

Written by
**DAVID SMITH**

By 1960, America was convinced it could not work with the new Cuba. Following a brief period of cautious hope, relations between the two countries had broken down to the point that the United States began seriously planning to overthrow Castro. The result would be a military operation that has been dubbed a "perfect failure". Under President Eisenhower, various plans were considered to trigger a counter-revolution in Cuba. The president was enthusiastic and pushed for aggressive action, the result being a plan put together by a task force known as 'WH/4'.

The plan called for multiple attacks on the stability of Castro's government, including psychological warfare, the fostering of discontent within the country and the development of a paramilitary force outside of it. Initially, the plan was to train guerrilla fighters and insert them covertly into Cuba, where they could work against the revolutionary government and trigger an uprising against Castro.

In May 1960, propaganda broadcasts started from a radio station on Greater Swan Island, near Cuba. At the same time, the first guerrilla fighters were being signed up from the Cuban exile population in Miami. Around 300 were soon in training. On 18 August, Eisenhower signed off on $13 million of funding for the operation, but insisted that no American personnel should be engaged in combat. Very quickly, however, the plan shifted from one of guerrilla infiltration to a full-scale amphibious landing. Guerrilla operations, it was now believed, would not do enough to attract support, whereas a dramatic demonstration of military power would. An amphibious landing, however, would require significant air cover and it would be impossible for America to remain invisible in the background.

## A NEW CHIEF

The situation was then complicated by the election of a new president. John F Kennedy came into office aware of the planned operation and having spoken stridently, while campaigning, of the need to confront Castro. He felt unable to cancel the planned invasion for fear of looking weak, but he also wanted to shrink it in scale, asking for "less spectacular" options.

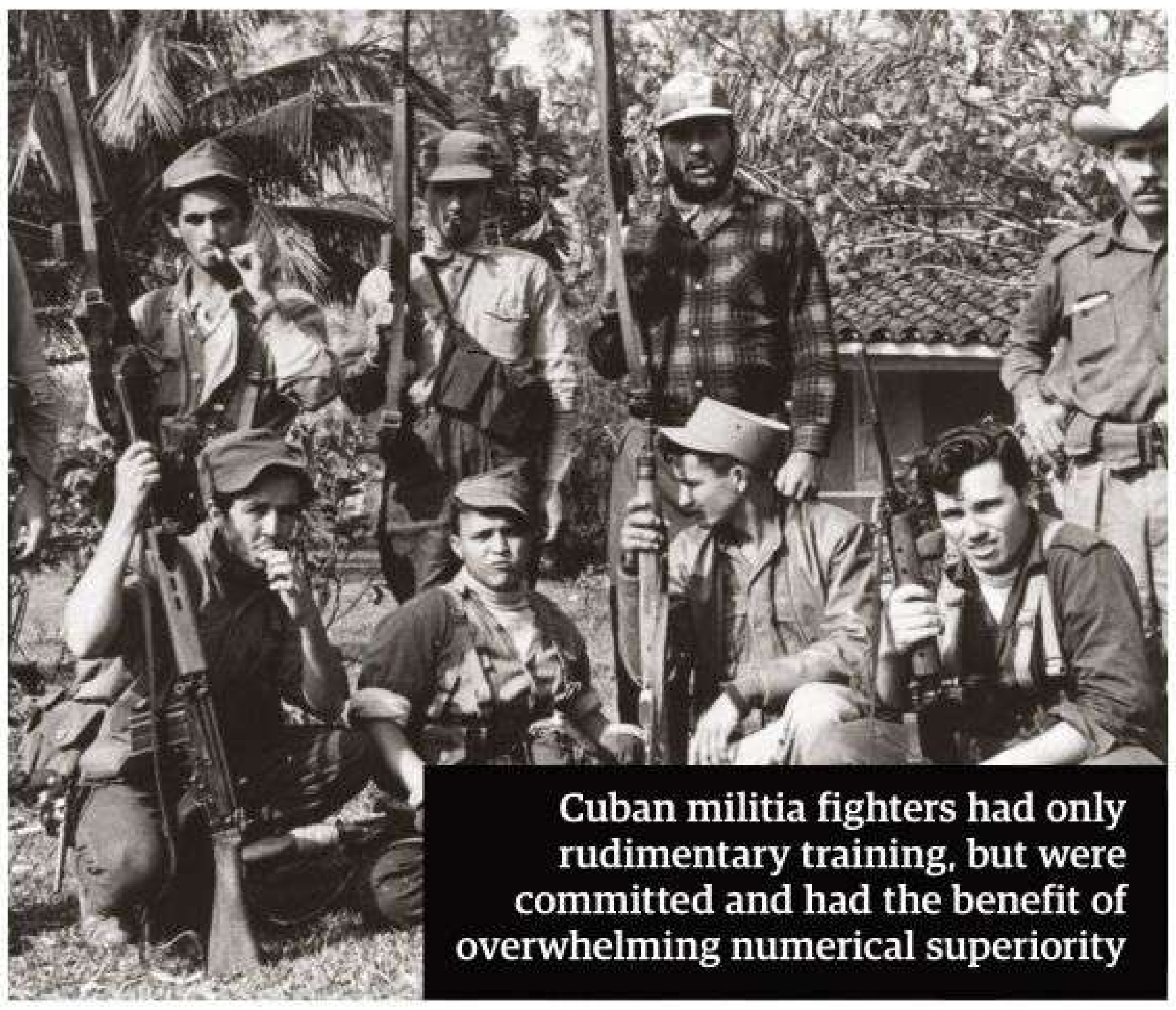
The final plan called for minor preparatory air strikes (using disguised American planes) to cripple Cuban air power, followed by a landing of around 1,500 'freedom fighters'. These men would set up a bridgehead on Cuba (originally planning to take the city of Trinidad) and dig in. It was hoped that this would be enough to set off an uprising among anti-Castro elements in the Cuban Army and among the civilian population, but if it did not, a counter-revolutionary government would be transported in, which would be recognised immediately by the United States as a legitimate opposition to Castro. America could then openly call for free elections, or support the alternative government with military force.

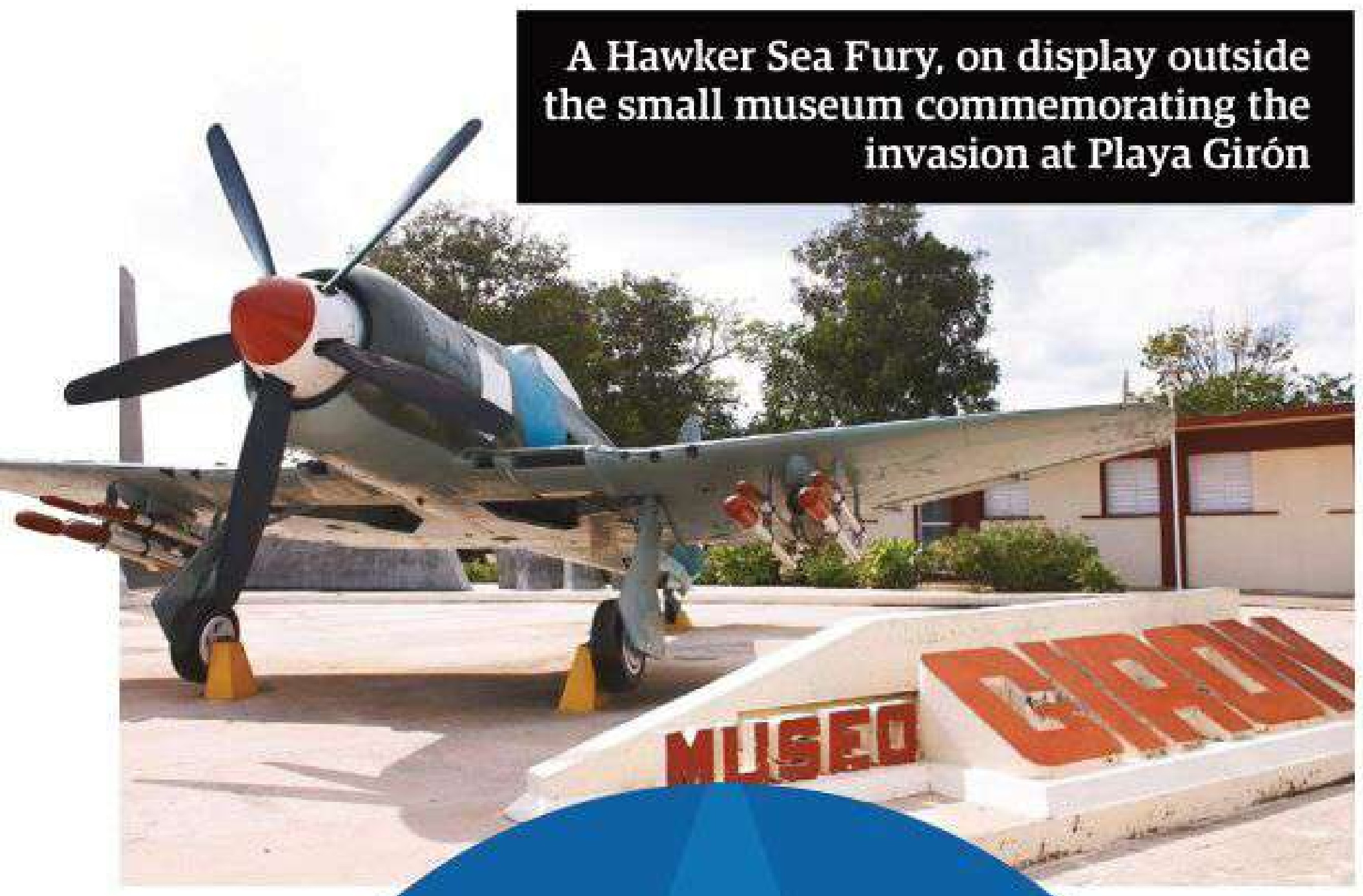
If the invasion failed to establish a strong beachhead, it was believed the invaders would be able to move into the country and establish guerrilla bases in the Escambray Mountains. Kennedy's continuing drive to scale the operation down, and his repeated demands for alternatives, led to a further change in planning. Instead of landing near Trinidad, the target shifted to beaches in the Bay of Pigs. These were 130 kilometres (80 miles) from the Escambray Mountains, so the success of the operation now hinged entirely on establishing a strong bridgehead.

> A wildly optimistic CIA paper of January 1961 reveals the Agency believed the invasion might topple the Castro regime "within a period of weeks"

## BRIGADE 2506

After receiving their training, the first recruits for the invasion force were then used to help train subsequent batches. By the end of 1960, there were around 500 men in training. Their base was in Guatemala, site of a successful US military operation to topple the government of President Árbenz in 1954. As recruits swelled their numbers, they were formed into 'Brigade 2506' and known


Cuban militia fighters had only rudimentary training, but were committed and had the benefit of overwhelming numerical superiority


A Hawker Sea Fury, on display outside the small museum commemorating the invasion at Playa Girón

The alternative government ready to land at the Bay of Pigs was called the Frente Revolucionario Democrático (the Cuban Democratic Revolutionary Front)

as brigadistas. They would eventually be organised into five small battalions, along with a single battalion of paratroopers, for a total of around 1,500 men. They would have limited air support but would be bringing huge amounts of ammunition, medical supplies and food to enable them to hold out on the beach as long as necessary. They would also have M41 Walker Bulldog tanks to counter the T-34 Russian tanks of Castro's forces.

As training progressed, however, events elsewhere were already making the success of any invasion highly doubtful. Castro was well aware of American intentions, thanks to intelligence from spies and sympathisers in Guatemala and the United States. Preparations were being made, with entrenchments being dug at multiple points along the coast. Not knowing where the invasion was likely to come was a problem, but the country was alert. Castro also guarded against the insertion of more guerrillas into the Escambray Mountains, training around 800 local farmers as militia.

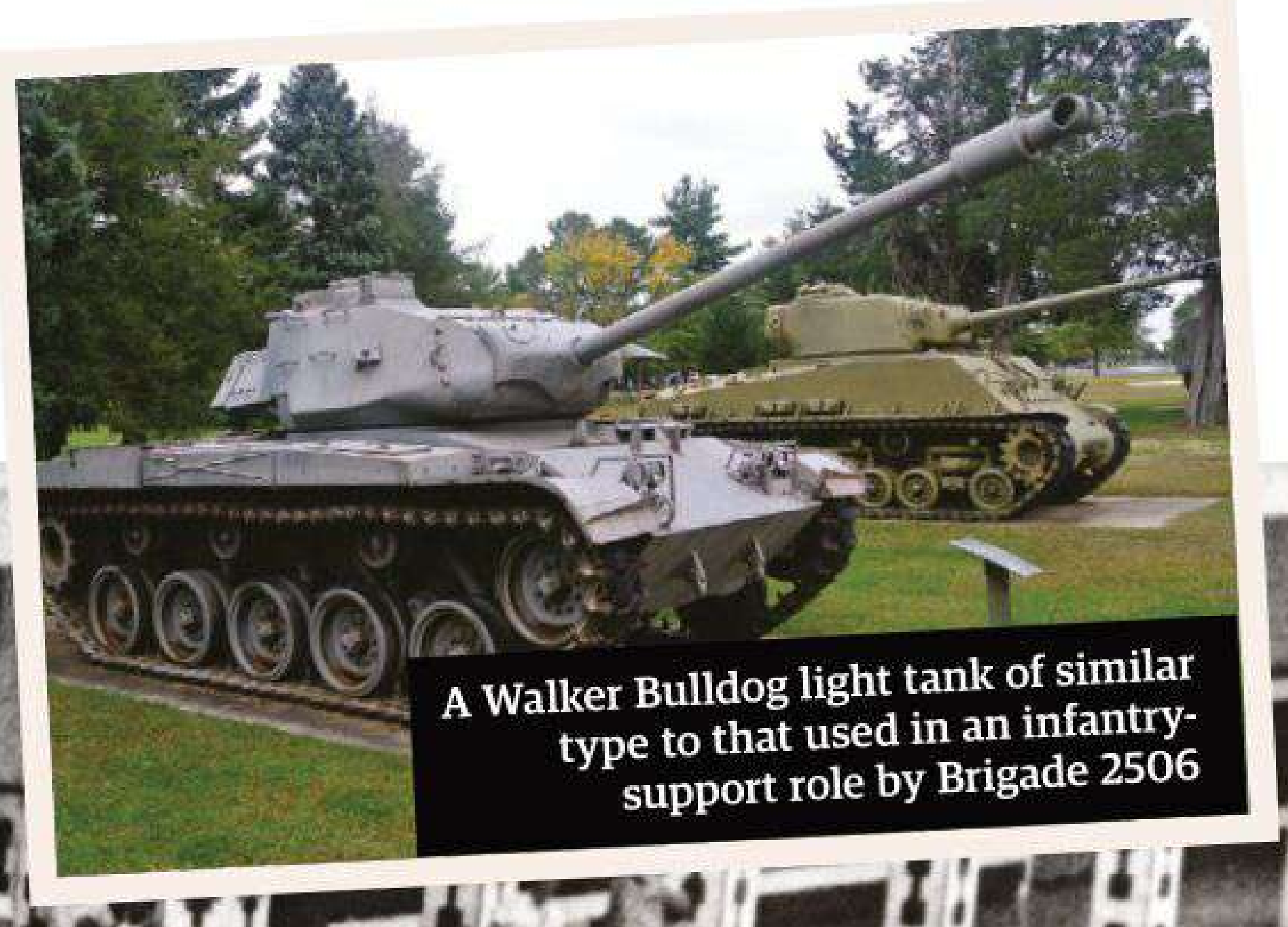
## THE AIR STRIKES

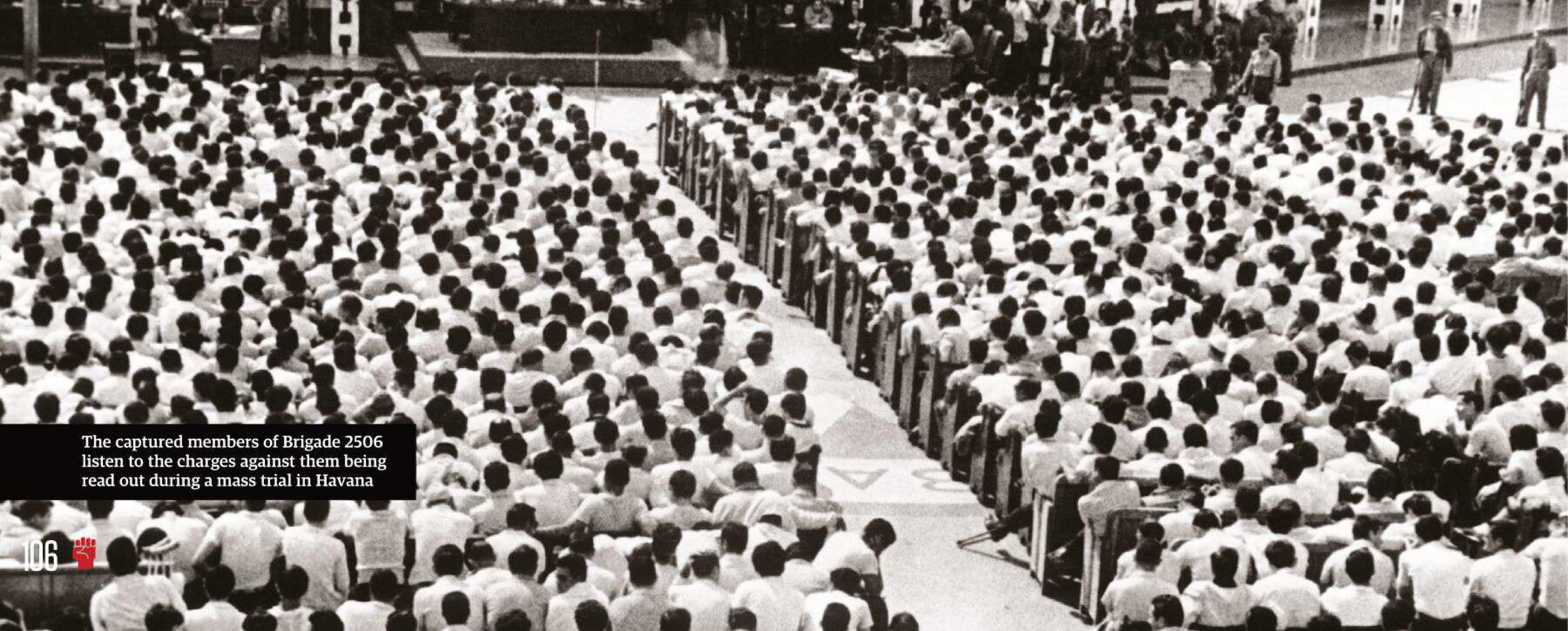
On 15 April 1961, eight disguised B-26 bombers flew over the coastline of Cuba and headed for their targets as part of Operation Puma. Painted in the colours of the Cuban Air Force, and with several of the planes bearing the same identification number to increase confusion, they intended to wipe out Cuban air power. Only partially successful, they eliminated a small number of planes but failed to neutralise the Cuban Air Force. Further air cover would be needed to ensure the landings went smoothly, and this increased the risk of American involvement becoming undeniable. On the night of 16 April, the first troops were landed in the Bay of Pigs and at 7.30 the following morning, the parachute battalion of Brigade 2506 was deployed to secure the only road into the area.

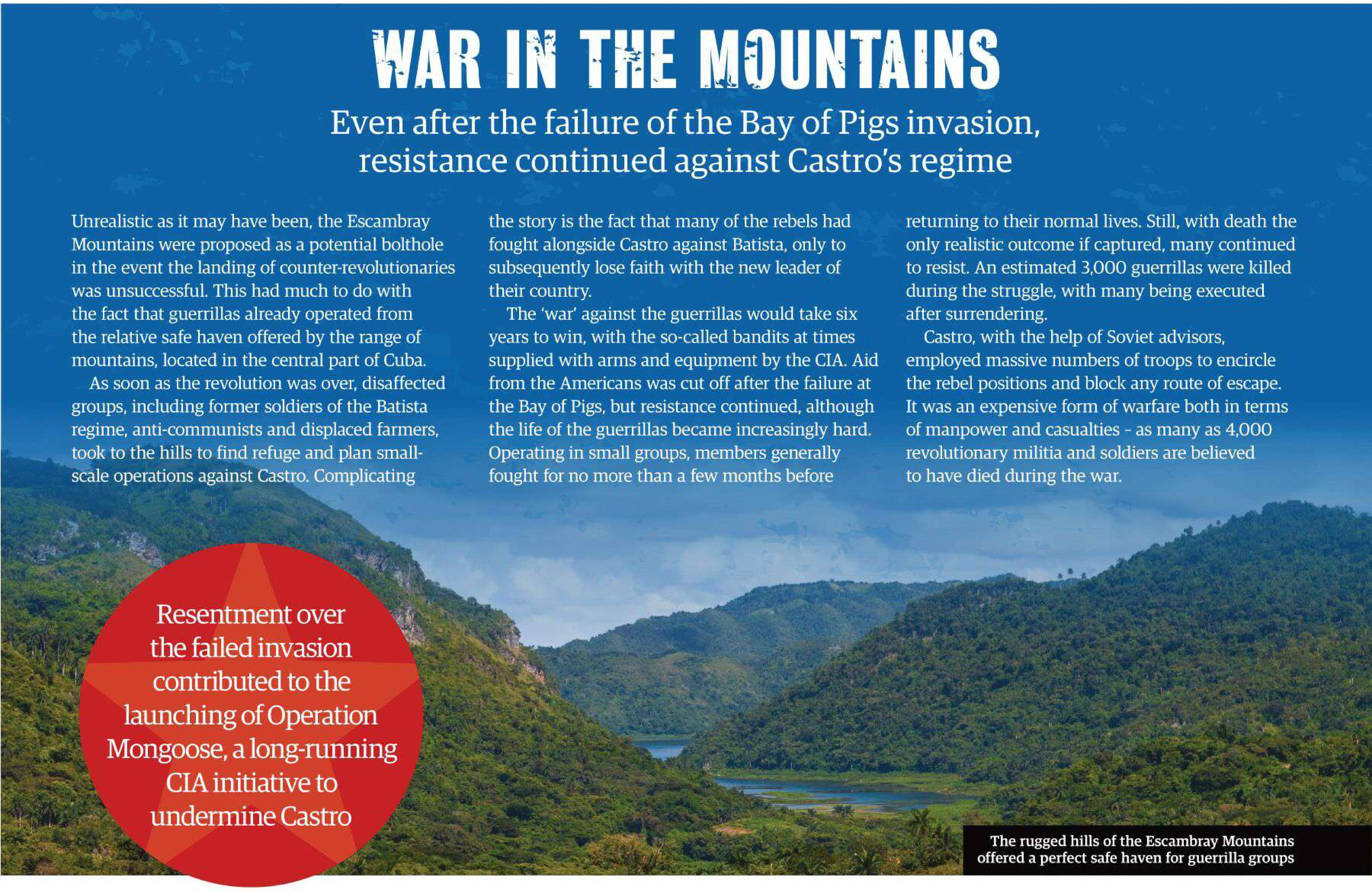
Things started to go wrong from the start. Cuban planes, though unimpressive in themselves, were able to strike effectively against the invasion force thanks to the absence of American air cover. A last-minute decision to call off further air strikes in support of the invasion left the brigadistas extremely vulnerable to machine-gun and rocket fire from Hawker Sea Fury fighter-bombers, and even armed training planes were able to attack with near impunity. Two transport ships were hit and sunk, with the loss of large quantities of medical supplies, ammunition and food. Many of the brigadistas subsequently struggled to shore without weapons.

The Cuban militia was also quick to respond. Although they got the worst of the fighting against the superior troops of the invasion force, they had overwhelming numbers on their side and were able to pin the invaders down. On the main landing beach, Playa Girón, the landings made little progress. At the secondary landing point, Playa Larga, they were actually driven back and forced to retreat to join the main force. Even the M41 tanks employed by the brigadistas were unable to hold their ground against the Cuban T-34s.

The parachute battalion, meanwhile, failed to seize control of the road to Playa Girón. Cuban reinforcements, including regular army units, were able to pour down the road to put pressure on the main landing point.


A Walker Bulldog light tank of similar type to that used in an infantry-support role by Brigade 2506


The captured members of Brigade 2506 listen to the charges against them being read out during a mass trial in Havana



# WAR IN THE MOUNTAINS

## Even after the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, resistance continued against Castro's regime

Unrealistic as it may have been, the Escambray Mountains were proposed as a potential bolthole in the event the landing of counter-revolutionaries was unsuccessful. This had much to do with the fact that guerrillas already operated from the relative safe haven offered by the range of mountains, located in the central part of Cuba.

As soon as the revolution was over, disaffected groups, including former soldiers of the Batista regime, anti-communists and displaced farmers, took to the hills to find refuge and plan small-scale operations against Castro. Complicating the story is the fact that many of the rebels had fought alongside Castro against Batista, only to subsequently lose faith with the new leader of their country.

The 'war' against the guerrillas would take six years to win, with the so-called bandits at times supplied with arms and equipment by the CIA. Aid from the Americans was cut off after the failure at the Bay of Pigs, but resistance continued, although the life of the guerrillas became increasingly hard. Operating in small groups, members generally fought for no more than a few months before returning to their normal lives. Still, with death the only realistic outcome if captured, many continued to resist. An estimated 3,000 guerrillas were killed during the struggle, with many being executed after surrendering.

Castro, with the help of Soviet advisors, employed massive numbers of troops to encircle the rebel positions and block any route of escape. It was an expensive form of warfare both in terms of manpower and casualties – as many as 4,000 revolutionary militia and soldiers are believed to have died during the war.

**The rugged hills of the Escambray Mountains offered a perfect safe haven for guerrilla groups**

Resentment over the failed invasion contributed to the launching of Operation Mongoose, a long-running CIA initiative to undermine Castro

The hopes of triggering a revolt had also been taken into consideration by Castro, who had rounded up an estimated 35,000 counter-revolutionary sympathisers in Havana and temporarily arrested them. There would be no spontaneous uprising.

Only major air strikes could now save the invasion, but Kennedy was unwilling to authorise them. Although American involvement was obvious, open support was too risky – the Soviet premier, Nikita Khrushchev, had been in touch directly to warn about the consequences of overt American involvement.

### THE PRICE OF FAILURE

By the morning of 18 April, the brigadistas were already considering making a break for the mountains, but there was no realistic hope of reaching them from their landing site. Rescue by two disguised American destroyers was briefly a possibility, but fire from Cuban tanks forced them away from the shore. Brigade 2506 had been abandoned. Only around 100 of the brigadistas were killed during the operation, but more than 1,200 were taken prisoner. Paraded on national television, they became a symbol of American impotence and remained in captivity until the end of the following year. In retrospect, the invasion was doomed to fail once it had been shorn of air support.

Kennedy, bemoaning the many faulty decisions that had led to the disaster would later ask, "How could I have been so stupid to let them go ahead?" The Bay of Pigs debacle had the opposite effect to that intended. It strengthened Castro, cost the Americans valuable prestige and drove Cuba closer to the Soviet Union. It would not take long for that to have potentially devastating consequences.

The prisoners of Brigade 2506 were honoured at a rally on 29 January 1962, held at the Orange Bowl football stadium in Miami

**President John F Kennedy and his wife attend a rally to welcome home the prisoners from the Bay of Pigs invasion**

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# 13 DAYS TO ARMAGEDDON

At the height of the Cold War, Cuba became the fulcrum of a deadly face-off between the Soviet Union and the United States

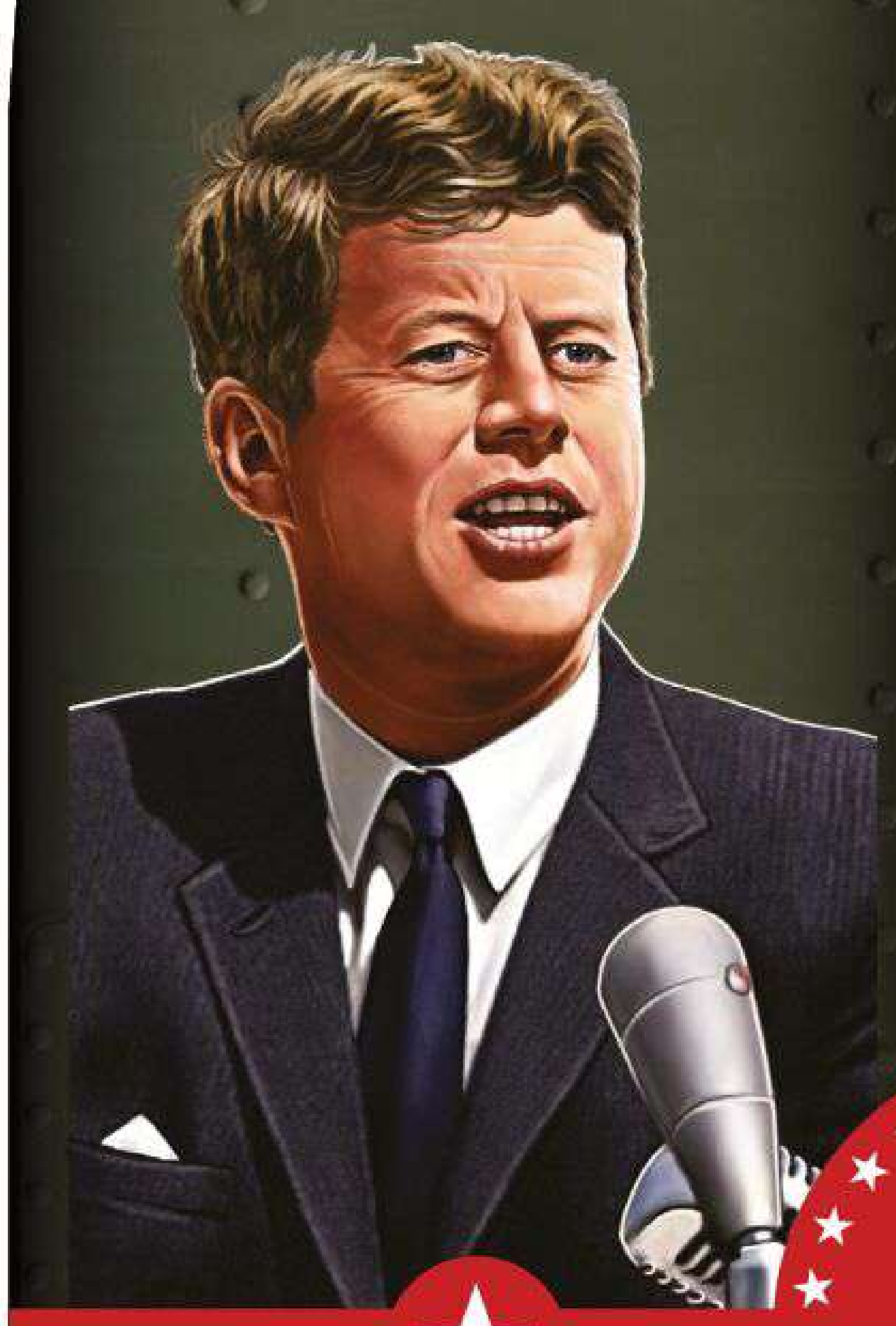
Written by
**OWEN WILLIAMS**

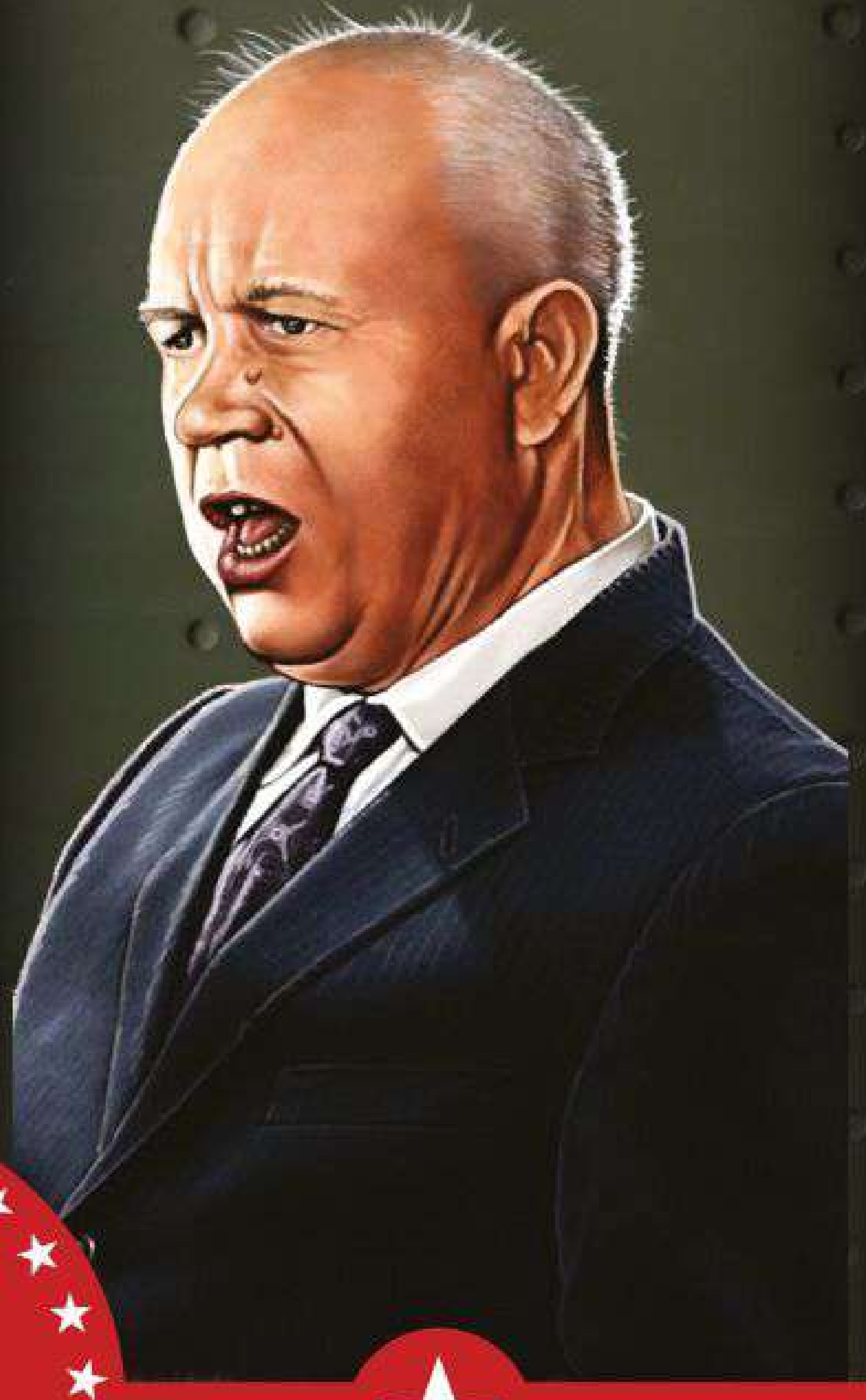
In October 1962 the world almost ended. At the height of the Cold War, the United States of America and the Soviet Union found themselves in a tense standoff over Russian medium and intermediate-range ballistic missiles being stockpiled in bases in the rebellious Republic of Cuba. Over a terrifying 13 days, the two superpowers came to the brink of nuclear war, with their mutually assured destruction looking alarmingly possible. To the Russians, this dark chapter of their history is referred to as the Caribbean Crisis. To the Cubans it's the October Crisis. But to America and much of the rest of the world, the words 'the Cuban Missile Crisis' are the ones that invoke that particular chill of almost unimaginable horror only narrowly averted.

By the time of the Crisis the United States and Russia had been engaged in their Cold War for almost 20 years since the end of the Second World War – some trace it back even further to the First World War. Not a conflict in the usual sense, it had mostly been an affair played out through espionage rather than military force, although the superpowers had each involved themselves in regional wars in China, Greece and Korea. After 1945, the single-party Marxist-Leninist Soviet State found itself in complete ideological opposition to the States' 'free' capitalist society, consolidating its control over the Eastern Bloc while the United States tried to contain it through international initiatives like NATO. Having wrestled for control and influence in Latin America and the decolonising states of Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia in the intervening years, events between the two sides came to a long-threatened head in Cuba.

The immediate roots of the Cuban Missile Crisis lay in Cuba's regime change of 1959: a revolution that ousted incumbent dictator Fulgencio Batista and installed the communist commander in chief of the Cuban Revolutionary Army, Fidel Castro, as prime minister and later president. As supporters of Batista and other Latin American dictators, the US government suddenly found itself on the receiving end of harsh criticism from Castro when he opened diplomatic relations with them. Their response was a failed attempt to assassinate Castro, after which he demanded the complete withdrawal of the US military from Guantánamo Bay. They refused and remain there; it's the only US military base in a country it doesn't officially recognise.

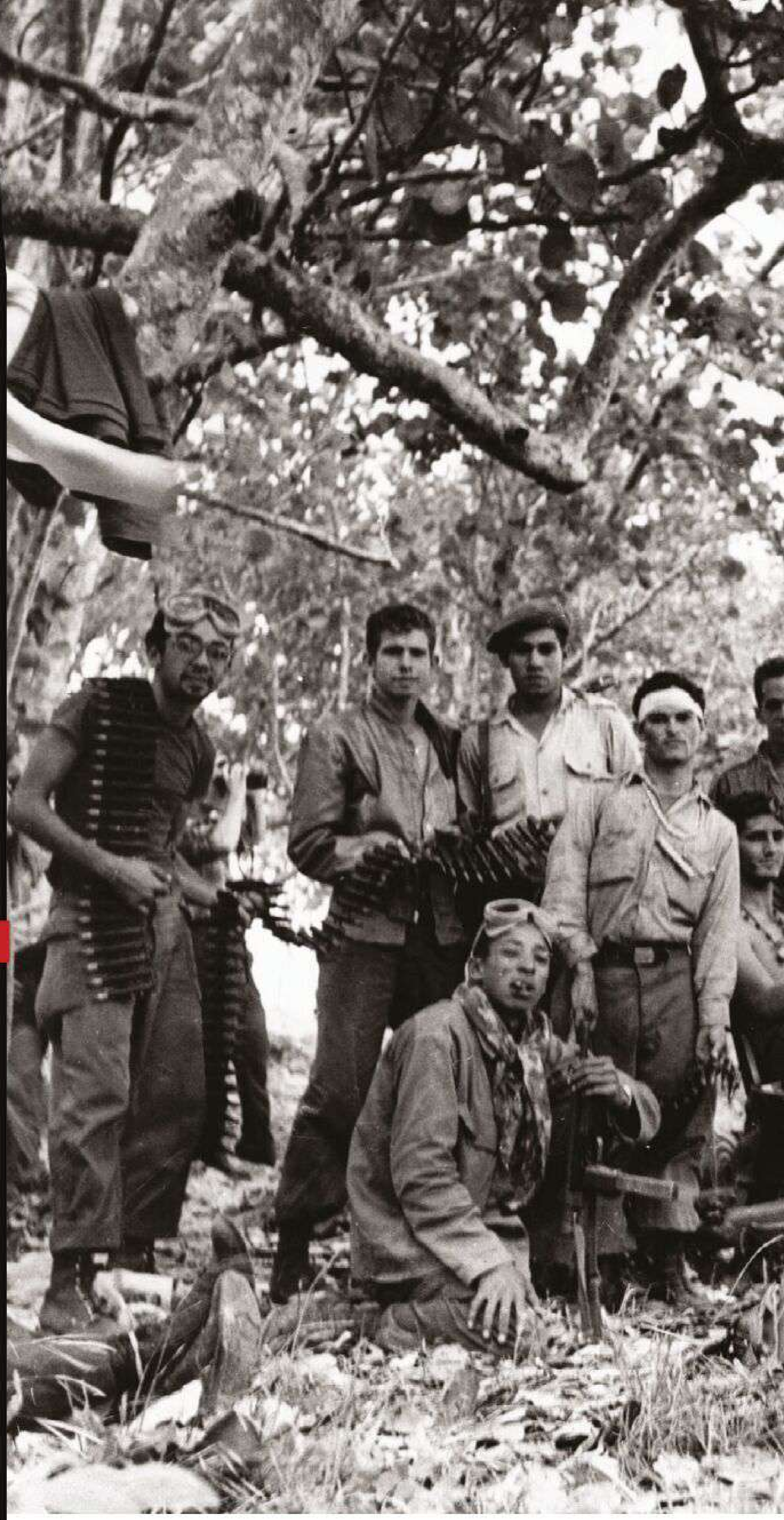
Castro travelled to the US in the spring of 1959 to meet with President Dwight D Eisenhower, but was snubbed by him and met only by Vice President Richard Nixon. Their meeting did not go well, and Castro further alienated the US when he announced to the United Nations that Cuba

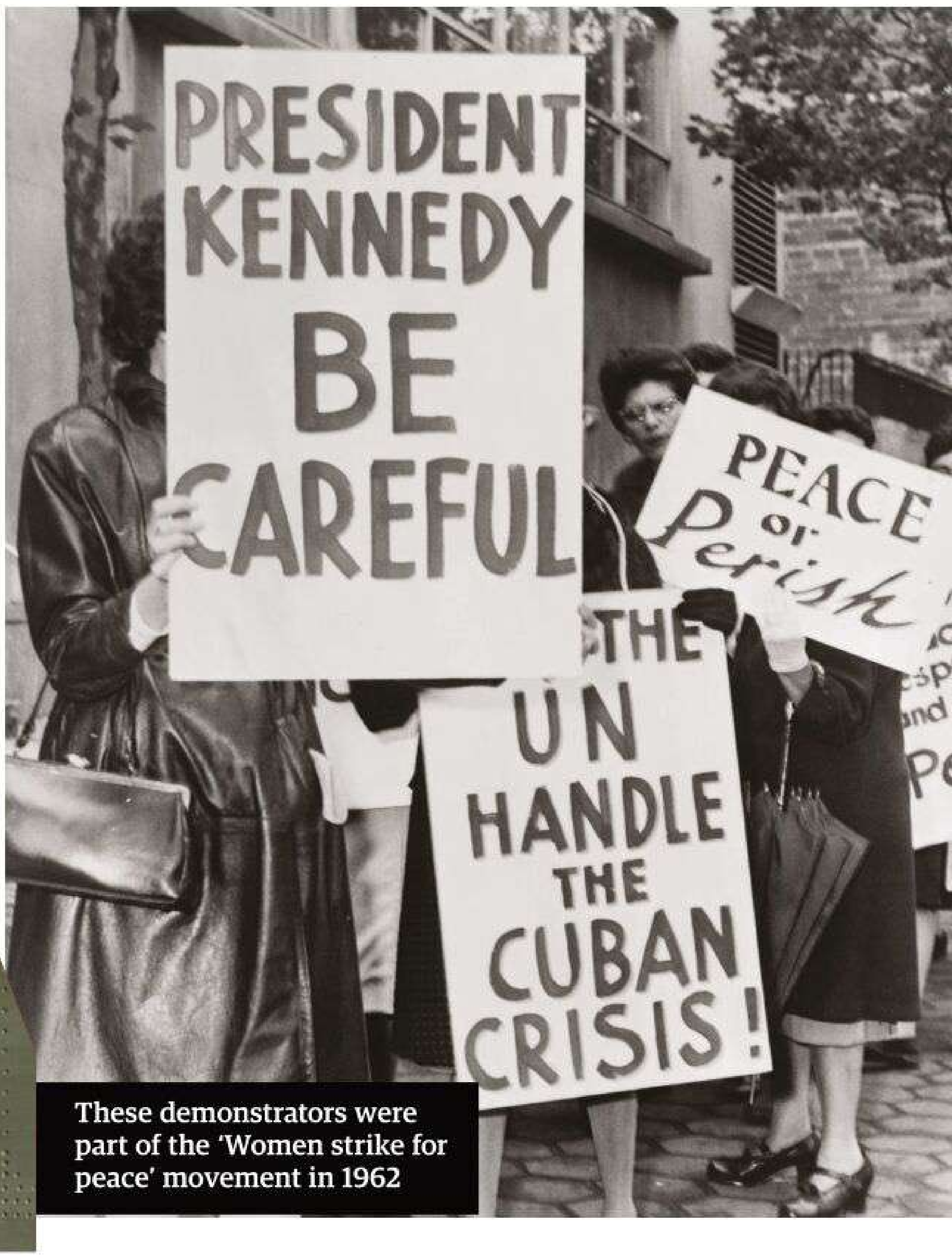




# KENNEDY V KHRUSHCHEV

| | KENNEDY | KHRUSHCHEV |
|---|---|---|
| POLITICAL STANCE | JFK became president in 1960 for the Democrat Party. He aimed to end racial segregation in schools and public places and liberalised immigration laws. He strengthened unemployment benefits and called on the nations of the world to band together to fight poverty, hunger and disease. He also urged Americans to be active citizens, famously saying, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." | Khrushchev was first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1958 until 1964. He was responsible for moving the Communist Party away from Stalinism, ending forced labour and closing the Gulags. He was an early backer of the Soviet Space Programme, and was behind some relatively liberal domestic policies, such as allowing more freedom to the arts and opening up the opportunity for ordinary Soviets to travel abroad. |
| FOREIGN POLICY | With his presidency at the height of the Cold War, Kennedy was a vehement anti-Communist. He fought Communism in developing nations and inaugurated the Space Race as much from a perceived necessity to beat the Russians to the Moon as for the scientific achievement. As well as the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy's administration intervened in Vietnam against Communists there. After Cuba, Kennedy's US negotiated a nuclear test ban treaty with the USSR and the UK. | The Soviet premier appointed himself as head of the USSR's UN delegation in 1960, where he was accused of a double standard: claiming to oppose colonialism while at the same time attempting Communist domination of Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia and the Third World. Achieving the first manned space flight led the world to infer the USSR's nuclear weapons programme was further ahead than it was. Khrushchev was happy not to disabuse anyone of that notion. |
| MILITARY EXPERIENCE | He served in the US Navy from 1941 until 1945. He was working in the office of the secretary of the Navy when the attack on Pearl Harbor took place, but he subsequently saw action in Panama and the Pacific, commanding torpedo boats and achieving the rank of lieutenant. He received the Purple Heart and the WWII Victory Medal among several other decorations. He was finally released from active service due to a recurring back injury. | He served in the Red Army as a political commissar, both during the Russian Civil War (1917-1922) and WWII. The rank was roughly equal to that of a unit commander, but the commissar has the military to countermand the commander's orders when he deems it necessary. Khrushchev's primary function was as a political intermediary between troops and Moscow. He did see action at the Defence of Stalingrad in 1942, though, which he remained proud of for the rest of his life. |
| ADVISORS | Among Kennedy's main advisors were Vice President Lyndon B Johnson, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield, Secretary of Defence Robert S McNamara and Attorney General Robert F Kennedy, JFK's brother. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy convened the special advisory committee EXCOMM, including all the above, ambassador to the Soviet Union Llewellyn Thompson, with members of the CIA and the Defence Department. | Extraordinary as it seems, Khrushchev, after rising to power, decided Soviet policy alone, without any recourse to advisors at all. This could, of course, be viewed as a weakness since it cut his decision-making process off from others, whose input may have been valuable. But it also allowed his instincts free reign: a positive thing in regard to the Cuban Missile Crisis, where his levelheaded inclination toward peace and negotiation arguably averted a global catastrophe. |





These demonstrators were part of the 'Women strike for peace' movement in 1962

A group of Cuban soldiers who helped in fighting the Bay of Pigs invasion

## THE BAY OF PIGS

### The failed invasion that led to the Crisis

### WHY IT HAPPENED

- **Concern in the US over the new left-wing direction of Cuba's politics after the removal of dictator Fulgencio Batista by revolutionary Fidel Castro.**
- **US concern over trials and executions of former Batista supporters.**
- **Castro was an outspoken critic of the USA.**

### WHAT WENT WRONG?

A damning CIA report from November 1961 outlined a catalogue of points that made the attempted invasion doomed to failure. Its author, Inspector General Lyman B. Kirkpatrick, identified that there were no policies or contingency plans in place should the invasion have succeeded. Insufficient and poorly managed staff had been assigned to the project, relatively few of whom even spoke Spanish. US intelligence in Cuba had been improperly analysed. There had been little success in organising internal resistance in Cuba, or of involving exiles from the Castro regime or counter-revolutionaries. And the operation had simply been too big: jumping from covert guerrilla action to full-blown military intervention in a way that made 'plausible deniability' impossible.

### TIMELINE OF EVENTS

**Prelude to invasion**
**16 April 1961**
The US mounts diversionary activities around other Cuban locations, to disguise its true intentions. These include the 'Phony War' of 16 April, around Baracoa and Guantánamo. Cuban revolutionary military forces scramble to meet their US attackers, putting up more of a fight than the US expects.

**Day one**
**17 April**
1,400 US troops, four transport ships and a fleet of smaller fibreglass boats enter the Bay of Pigs. Cuba responds with fighter jets and bombers. US paratroopers are dropped onto the island, but land in a swamp and lose all their equipment. Osvaldo Ramirez, leader of the Cuban resistance against Castro, is captured and summarily executed by Castro's supporters.

**Day two**
**18 April**
Cuban troops, tanks and militia force the invaders and resistance into retreat in several areas. CIA pilots in B-26 bomber planes use bombs, napalm and rockets against Cuban targets, causing civilian casualties alongside their intended police and military victims.

**Day three**
**19 April**
Four US airmen are killed when Cuban forces mount a spirited defence against another CIA air attack. Anti-Castro forces on the ground, with their air support lost and ammunition running low, retreat in the face of a Cuban onslaught and have to be evacuated. The US withdraws from the invasion.

**The aftermath**
**20 April onward**
US destroyer ships search for survivors along the Cuban coast while intelligence-gathering flights continue. Hundreds of executions take place in Cuba as retaliation against the opposition, and Castro gloats over his prisoners of war. He offers the US a deal to exchange them for tractors. They eventually get food and medicine instead.

would maintain a neutral position in the fractious relationship between the USA and the USSR. Subsequent policies redistributing Cuba's wealth were predictably unpopular with Americans who owned land there and were seeing it removed from them at rates of compensation they were unhappy with. The CIA launched another failed assassination attempt against Castro, and the US military began launching secret bombing raids against Cuban sugar facilities in October 1959, targeting one of its most lucrative exports. American attacks on Cuban oil refineries and civilian targets in Havana followed, all of which the US officially denied.

Castro signed a trade deal with Soviet Deputy Prime Minister Anastas Mikoyan in February 1960, hoping it would gain him more leverage in the US. The opposite was true, and Eisenhower, pushed to the limits of his patience with the upstart Cuba, ordered the CIA to overthrow the Republic. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev publicly came out in support of Cuba; America launched yet another three failed Castro assassination attempts, one of them involving the Mafia; and by April of 1961 America had both imposed full trade and economic sanctions against Cuba and undertaken a covert attempted invasion. The newly elected president, John F Kennedy, continued to deny any such activity, but by now the American press were on the case and the word was out. Khrushchev warned that the Soviets would intervene against any aggression from the US toward Cuba, and the US, after the death of 200 of its soldiers and the loss of a further thousand as prisoners of war in the Bay of Pigs debacle, was forced to call off its incursion. Kennedy and his government had been thoroughly humiliated.

Beginning to see Kennedy as weak, Khrushchev and the Soviets used the lull to seize an opportunity. In August of 1962, reports began reaching the US from Cuba that Soviet trucks loaded with suspicious equipment had been seen on the island. As retaliation for the US installing its own nuclear missiles close to the USSR, Russia was doing the same in the Caribbean: a sizeable arsenal of SS-4 nuclear warheads had been installed on the island, capable of reaching the US east coast, including the political hub of Washington, DC. While initially claiming they were simply providing nonnuclear surface-to-air missiles for Cuba's defence against its hostile neighbours, Khrushchev's real agenda was to gain a stronger political foothold both against the US and its allies in Britain and Europe.

Kennedy's response was to set up EXCOMM – the Executive Committee of the National Security Council – which suggested six options. Doing nothing was obviously impossible, but diplomacy was already not working; threatening Castro generally achieved the opposite of the desired effect; and either war with or the occupation of Cuba was an enormous risk. The ultimate decision, then, was to blockade the island, although for legal reasons (it would be considered an act of war) this was sold as a 'quarantine' of Cuba.

At 7pm on 22 October 1962, Kennedy announced on US television and radio that this 'quarantine' of Cuba was in effect immediately, stopping the

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> "Assassination attempts and attacks on Havana took place, all of which the US officially denied"

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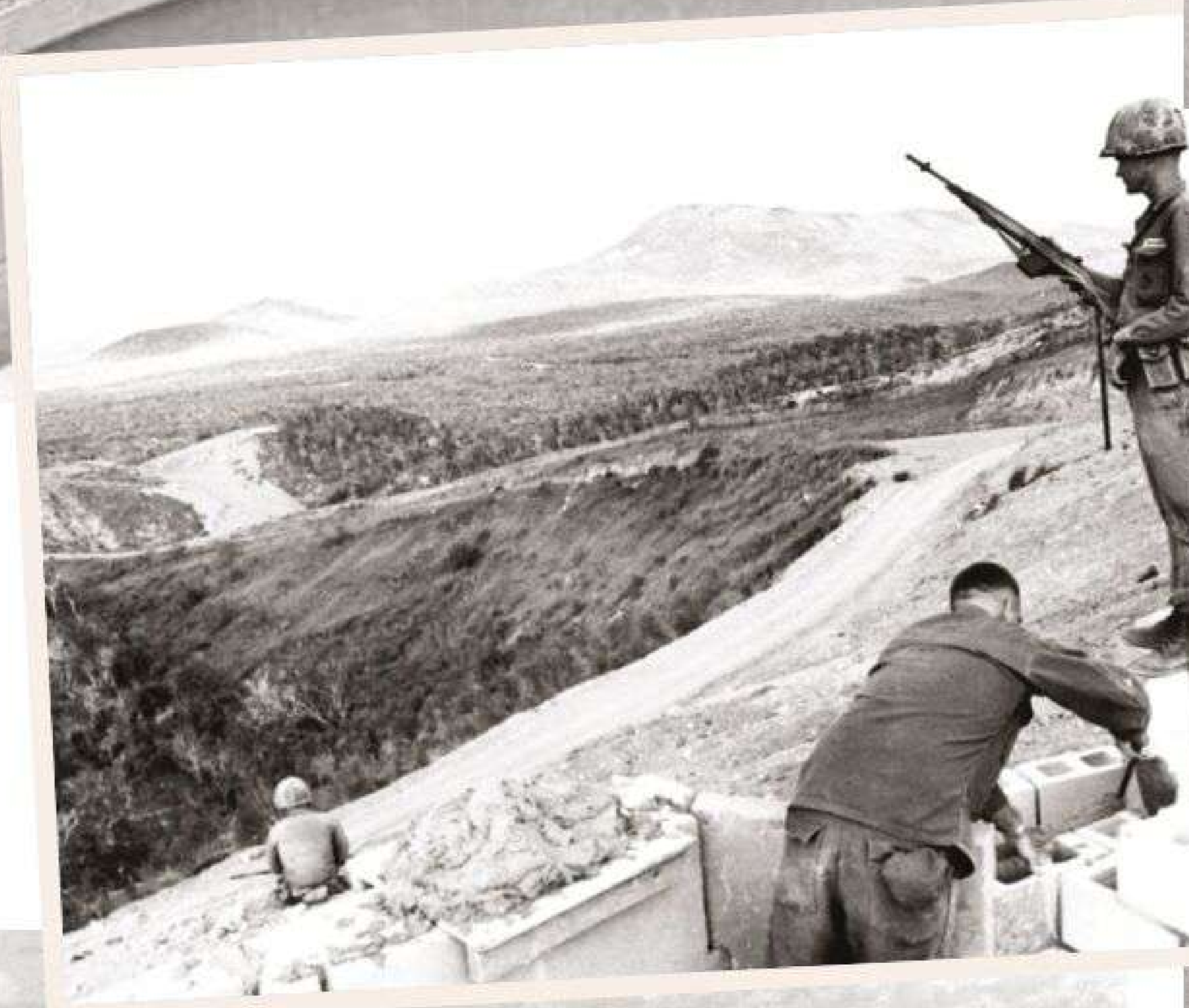
Adlai Stevenson showing photos of nuclear missiles in Cuba to the UN Security Council



A Neptune warplane flying over a Soviet transport ship in October 1962

Strategic Air Command personnel looking at reconnaissance photos

# THE LONGEST 13 DAYS IN HISTORY

A day-by-day account of the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis

**16 October** President Kennedy and his staff are briefed on recon photos of Russian missile bases under construction in Cuba. Kennedy maintains his public schedule while covertly discussing whether to launch air strikes against Cuba or a blockade of its coasts.

**17 October** Kennedy continues his official public engagements, feeling it important to keep up appearances rather than arouse alarm. He has lunch with Crown Prince Hassan of Libya and visits Connecticut in support of Democratic election candidates.

**18 October** Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko insists that Russia's aid to Cuba is purely in the cause of defence and represents no threat to the USA. Kennedy warns Gromyko of grave consequences should Soviet nuclear weapons be found on Cuban soil.

**19 October** Kennedy heads out on the congressional campaign trail to Ohio and Illinois, as previously scheduled before the missile crisis surfaced. Debate continues to rage among his advisors as to the best course of action in Cuba as Kennedy travels.

**20 October** Kennedy returns to Washington, and after an intense five hours of deliberation, the plan to blockade – or quarantine – Cuba is finally decided upon. Work begins on the military and naval plans, and on drafting a speech to inform the public of the situation.

**21 October** Another day of meetings and phone calls on both sides. Tactical Air Commander Walter Sweeney advises Kennedy that an air strike against Cuba could not guarantee the destruction of all the Russian missiles on the ground.

> “The decision to blockade the island was [for legal reasons] sold as a ‘quarantine’ of Cuba”

shipment of all offensive military equipment to Cuba. 5,000 US troops were deployed to the Guantánamo base, along with airborne and naval forces. In turn, Castro began to mobilise Cuba’s forces, and Khrushchev declared the quarantine to be an overtly hostile manoeuvre, threatening that war with the United States was becoming a very real possibility if the States didn’t leave Cuba alone.

The next day, US planes ascertained that the Soviets were actually performing launch tests on their missiles, leading US ships to take up position off Cuba’s coastline, barring any ships from getting any nearer to the island. By 25 October, Kennedy had written to Khrushchev promising full-scale conflict if the Soviets didn’t remove their missiles from Cuban soil. Khrushchev’s eventual response on 26 October was to suggest a compromise: the USSR would withdraw its nuclear arsenal in exchange for a legal assurance from the US that it would never invade Cuba again, or support any other country attempting to do so.

Kennedy was willing to use this as the basis for some serious negotiations, but Castro, caught in the middle of the standoff, remained unconvinced, distrustful of Kennedy. He wrote to Khrushchev outlining his belief that the US would eventually invade Cuba regardless of what had been agreed, and giving carte-blanche to the Soviets to remain in Cuba with their missiles, as the island’s first best line of defence and deterrent. “I believe the imperialists’ aggressiveness is extremely dangerous,” said the Cuban prime minister in what’s now known as ‘The Armageddon Letter’. “If they actually carry out the brutal act of invading Cuba in violation of international law and morality, that would be the moment to eliminate such danger forever through an act of clear legitimate defence, however harsh and terrible the solution would be.”

On 27 October the confrontation escalated alarmingly, when US Air Force Major Rudolf Anderson was shot down and killed in his F-102 fighter when he strayed into Cuban airspace. Further US reconnaissance aircraft attempting to ascertain the lie of the land were also fired upon from the ground, while at practically the same time, dangerous events were occurring beneath the waters of the Caribbean. The US naval destroyer USS Beale had tracked down the Soviet submarine B-59 and begun dropping depth charges on it, scoring several hits. However, the Beale’s crew didn’t know the B-59 was carrying a 15-kiloton nuclear torpedo. Running out of air and surrounded by ships that wouldn’t allow it to surface, the B-59’s officers came horrendously close to desperately launching their payload before Captain Vasili Arkhipov managed to persuade his comrades to stand down and surrender. He may have saved the world in the process.

As all this was occurring, Kennedy received another letter from Khrushchev offering to withdraw his weapons from Cuba if the US would do the same in Turkey. The attacks on the US planes had not been officially sanctioned

## THE HOTLINE It’s good to talk

Pictured in the popular imagination as a red telephone, the Moscow-Washington hotline has never been a phone at all. It began life as a Teletype system, and kept that form for two decades until it was replaced with fax machines. Since 2008 it’s been a secure computer link for email messages.

The hotline was set up immediately after the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1963, linking the Pentagon directly to the Kremlin, so that immediate communication can begin should any hostilities or ‘misunderstandings’ arise. During the Crisis it dangerously often took many hours for the US to translate and decode Khruschev’s messages.

While it seems like a sensible idea, Kennedy was criticised by the Republican Party of the time over the hotline’s implementation. The accusation was that Kennedy would alienate his “proven allies” by speaking to his “sworn enemies” first!

U.S. AIR FORCE

Nuclear missiles like this Jupiter rocket were placed in Turkey and Italy

**22 October** Kennedy informs UK PM Harold MacMillan of the ongoing crisis and writes to Khrushchev. In the letter, Kennedy writes: “Not you or any other sane man would […] deliberately plunge the world into war which no country could win.” He also makes a US television address.

**23 October** The US ‘quarantine’ ships move into place around Cuba, while Soviet submarines lurk nearby. Kennedy asks Khrushchev to halt any Russian vessels approaching Cuba. Robert Kennedy visits the Soviet Embassy to meet with their ambassador.

**24 October** Khrushchev responds to Kennedy’s letters with hostility, complaining the US is using intimidation. “You are no longer appealing to reason,” says the Soviet premier. “You are threatening that if we do not give into your demands you will use force.”

**25 October** Kennedy writes to Khrushchev urging a Russian withdrawal from Cuba, and rejects UN Secretary General U. Thant’s proposal of a ‘cooling-off period’, as Soviet missiles would remain in Cuba. Heated debates between the US and the USSR take place at the UN.

**26 October** Castro writes to Khrushchev urging him not to back down, even if it means making a stand with catastrophic force. But Khrushchev contacts Kennedy to suggest a solution: the USA’s removal of its own nuclear weapons from Turkey and Italy in exchange for the USSR’s withdrawal from Cuba.

**27 October** A US U-2 plane is shot down over Cuban airspace by Soviet missiles, and the pilot is killed. Meanwhile, a Russian submarine with a nuclear warhead aboard is attacked. Robert Kennedy secretly meets with the Soviet ambassador and cautious terms are agreed.

**28 October** Radio Moscow announces the USSR has agreed to leave Cuba on the understanding that the US can never again attempt an invasion, and that US WMDs will be removed from sites near Russia. Castro is furious to learn the news from public radio.

Kennedy signing the Cuba Quarantine Proclamation

> "Castro, who had not been consulted, was furious to learn the news of the Soviet withdrawal from the radio"

by the Russians, but had been on the orders of commanders acting independently. The USSR seemed dangerously close to losing control of its own forces, and if that happened, catastrophic consequences might have been on the cards.

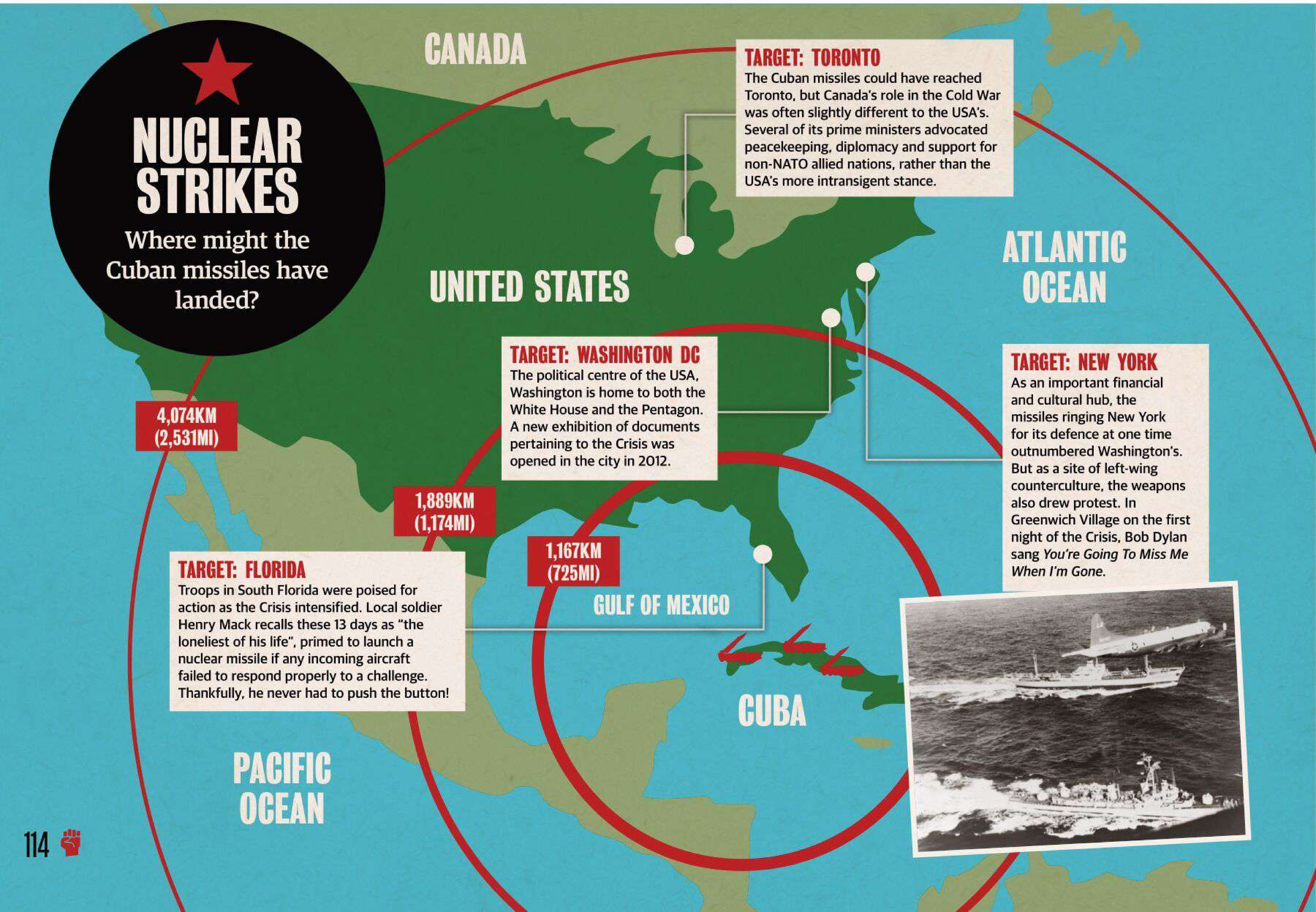
Kennedy replied to Khrushchev accepting his terms: pledging the US would never again invade Cuba if the Russian warheads were removed and, in a private addendum, agreeing to remove the USA's own missiles threatening the USSR from Turkey. Khrushchev revealed later that Kennedy also offered to remove the US's nuclear arsenal from Italy: a symbolic gesture only since the Italian weapons were obsolete.

At 9am on 28 October, a message from Khrushchev was broadcast on Radio Moscow, stating that work at the Russian weapon sites in Cuba would cease immediately, and that the arsenal would be dismantled and returned to the USSR. A relieved Kennedy responded immediately, promising to honour the agreement and calling Khrushchev's decision "an important and constructive contribution to peace." Castro, who had not been consulted by either side, was furious to learn the news from the radio.

The US 'quarantine' of Cuba didn't end immediately, with aerial reconnaissance continuing to monitor whether the Soviets were packing up as promised. These missions were thankfully uneventful, and the Russian missiles and their supporting equipment were successfully loaded onto eight ships, leaving Cuban waters between 5 and 9 November. The blockade officially ended on 20 November. The USA removed its nuclear missiles from Turkey the following April. Castro may have been angry, and Soviet-Cuban relations significantly cooled, but the fact was that his position had been thoroughly strengthened by the Crisis. The US could not now attack Cuba – or Castro personally – without breaking the terms of

## NUCLEAR STRIKES

Where might the Cuban missiles have landed?



**TARGET: TORONTO**

The Cuban missiles could have reached Toronto, but Canada's role in the Cold War was often slightly different to the USA's. Several of its prime ministers advocated peacekeeping, diplomacy and support for non-NATO allied nations, rather than the USA's more intransigent stance.

**TARGET: WASHINGTON DC**

The political centre of the USA, Washington is home to both the White House and the Pentagon. A new exhibition of documents pertaining to the Crisis was opened in the city in 2012.

**TARGET: NEW YORK**

As an important financial and cultural hub, the missiles ringing New York for its defence at one time outnumbered Washington's. But as a site of left-wing counterculture, the weapons also drew protest. In Greenwich Village on the first night of the Crisis, Bob Dylan sang *You're Going To Miss Me When I'm Gone.*

**TARGET: FLORIDA**

Troops in South Florida were poised for action as the Crisis intensified. Local soldier Henry Mack recalls these 13 days as "the loneliest of his life", primed to launch a nuclear missile if any incoming aircraft failed to respond properly to a challenge. Thankfully, he never had to push the button!

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The three leaders state their cases

"In our discussions and exchanges [...} the one thing that has most concerned me has been the possibility that your government would not correctly understand the will and determination of the United States in any given situation, since I have not assumed that you or any other sane man would, in this nuclear age, deliberately plunge the world into war which it is crystal clear no country could win and which could only result in catastrophic consequences to the whole world."

**Kennedy to Khrushchev, 22 Oct 1962**

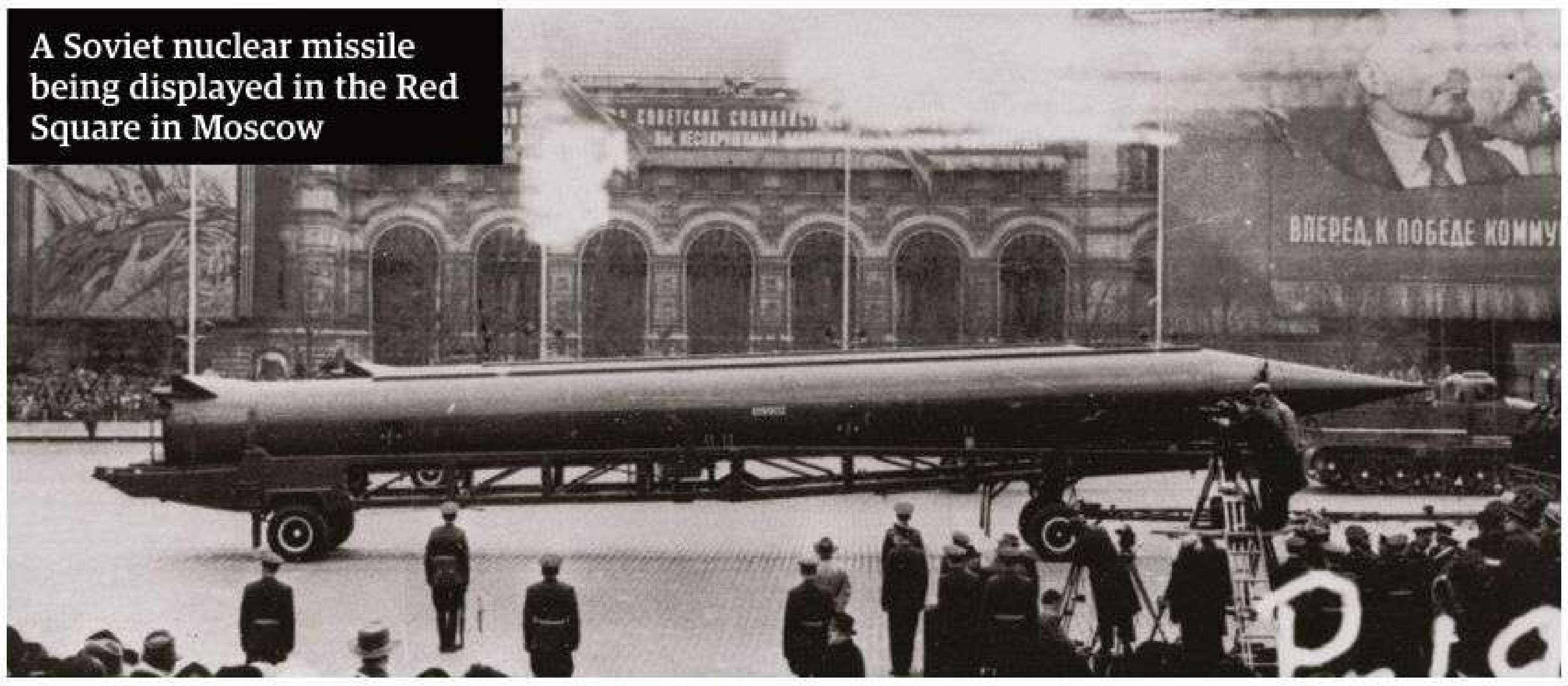
"You, Mr President, are not declaring a quarantine, but rather are setting forth an ultimatum and threatening that if we do not give in to your demands you will use force. Consider what you are saying! And you want to persuade me to agree to this! [...] You are no longer appealing to reason, but wish to intimidate us."

**Khrushchev to JFK, 24 Oct 1962**

"The Soviet Union must never allow circumstances in which the imperialists could carry out a nuclear first strike against it. [If] the imperialists carry out an invasion of Cuba – a brutal act in violation of universal and moral law – then that would be the moment to eliminate this danger forever, in an act of the most legitimate self-defence. However harsh and terrible the solution, there would be no other."

**Castro to Khrushchev, 26 Oct 1962**

Kennedy meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko on 18 October 1962



A Soviet nuclear missile being displayed in the Red Square in Moscow

These Soviet missiles were placed in Cuba in October 1962

> "Khrushchev was seen as having backed away from circumstances he had initiated in the first place"

their own peace treaty and risking the full weight of Russian reprisal.

In the aftermath of the Crisis, the Moscow-Washington hotline was set up: directly connecting the two political superpowers to facilitate easier negotiation and communication should such a dire situation ever occur again. Major Rudolf Anderson remained the only combatant killed during the standoff (although a further 18 personnel died in crashes and accidents) and his body was returned to the States and buried in South Carolina with full military honours.

While Castro was reasonably secure, neither the US nor the USSR came out of the Crisis covered in glory. Khrushchev remained in power in the Soviet Union for two more years, but his eventual ousting was directly attributable to the embarrassment he and his country had suffered in Cuba, and the Politburo's perception of him as having managed the situation ineptly. He was seen as having backed away from circumstances he had initiated in the first place, agreeing to humiliating concessions in the process.

Meanwhile, while the US publicly attempted to sell the outcome as a victory, it was also conflicted. US Air Force General Curtis Le May for example, although his was a minority opinion, called the Cuban Missile Crisis "the greatest defeat in [US] history." Le May had stridently argued for an invasion of Cuba from the earliest moments of the crisis, and continued to do so after the Russians' withdrawal. "We could have gotten not only the missiles out of Cuba, we could have gotten the Communists out of Cuba at that time," he was still railing 25 years later.

In the end, it was perhaps humanity itself that won the Cuban Missile Crisis, receiving in the process a desperately urgent wake-up call that the balance of power on our planet was being juggled between two super-states who had the capacity to annihilate one another at a moment's notice, and to likely take most everyone else with them. Conservative estimates suggest the casualties of a nuclear war between the US and the USSR would have numbered in the hundreds of millions.

Scarily enough, however, the famous Doomsday Clock, which provides a symbolic, visual representation in 'minutes to midnight' of how close the world is at any given time to a politically related global catastrophe, didn't move during the Crisis, since it happened faster than the clock's board could react. Immediately before the Crisis it stood at seven minutes to midnight, and afterward it moved back to 12: the world deemed a safer place thanks to the treaty. Today, the Doomsday Clock's hands stand at two minutes to midnight, 'thanks' to the lack of global action to reduce nuclear stockpiles, the potential for regional conflict, and the effects of avoidable climate change. The idea of mutually assured destruction may in modern times feel like an anachronism belonging firmly in the past. But some sources suggest it's closer than ever.

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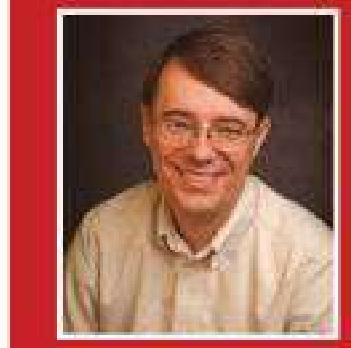
# WHAT IF... THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS HAD ESCALATED

## THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS 1962

Interview by
JONATHAN O'CALLAGHAN

### DR ERIC SWEDIN



Dr Eric Swedin is an associate professor in the History department at Weber State University in Utah, USA. He is the author of numerous books including *When Angels Wept: A What-If History Of The Cuban Missile Crisis*, which won the 2010 Sidewise Award in Alternate History, and *Survive The Bomb: The Radioactive Citizen's Guide To Nuclear Survival*. He also teaches courses on both modern and historical civilisation.

**What would have happened if the Cuban Missile Crisis had escalated into nuclear war?**
I think that if the US had chosen to bomb and invade Cuba, it would not have worked out how they expected because there were tactical nukes on the island that they weren't aware of. It looks like, historically, the Soviet commander [on Cuba] had launch authority, and he probably would have used those missiles and that would have shocked the Americans. It could have easily escalated into an exchange of weapons.

The only thing that could have stopped this is if the Soviets realised how small their strategic forces were – [in terms of the] weapons they could hit the USA with. America had an enormous arsenal of munitions that could be used.

Hopefully sanity would have prevailed, but often people get caught up in the situation and I think they could easily have gone on to a general war. In a general war the Soviet Union would have been obliterated. I mean, strategic forces on the side of the US were so strong, so I think the US would have survived the war. Now I'm only talking about 1962; if this war had happened several years later then the US would not have survived as a viable entity, because one of the major knock-on effects of the Cuban Missile Crisis was that the Soviets enormously increased their strategic forces and, within a decade, were on parity with the US.

**What was the major turning point in the crisis?**
From the revelations after the fall of the Soviet Union with historians being able to look at Soviet military records it's now apparent that, as soon as Kennedy announced the quarantine [a naval blockade on Cuba], Nikita Khrushchev immediately started taking steps to back down.

“A US city would almost certainly have been hit by a nuke from the Soviets, killing tens of thousands of Americans”

If the crisis had not been resolved, it’s likely several major US cities would have been targeted by nuclear weapons

He stopped the ships that were carrying the missiles towards Cuba, so they did not push on and go ‘eyeball to eyeball’. However, the Americans didn’t realise that at the time because they weren’t getting good intelligence on where exactly the ships were at sea. So Khrushchev really started to back down, but it could easily have still stumbled into war because they didn’t have a good mechanism for communicating; the hotline [installed between the two leaders’ offices after the crisis] didn’t exist at this point.

**If the crisis had escalated into all-out war, what would have happened first in your opinion?**

I think they would have been stumbling into war in gradual escalation. In this scenario, the US not only bombs Cuba but it invades. That’s exactly what the military leadership in the US wanted to do. And if they had invaded, [a US city] would almost certainly have been hit by a nuke from the Soviets, killing tens of thousands of Americans.

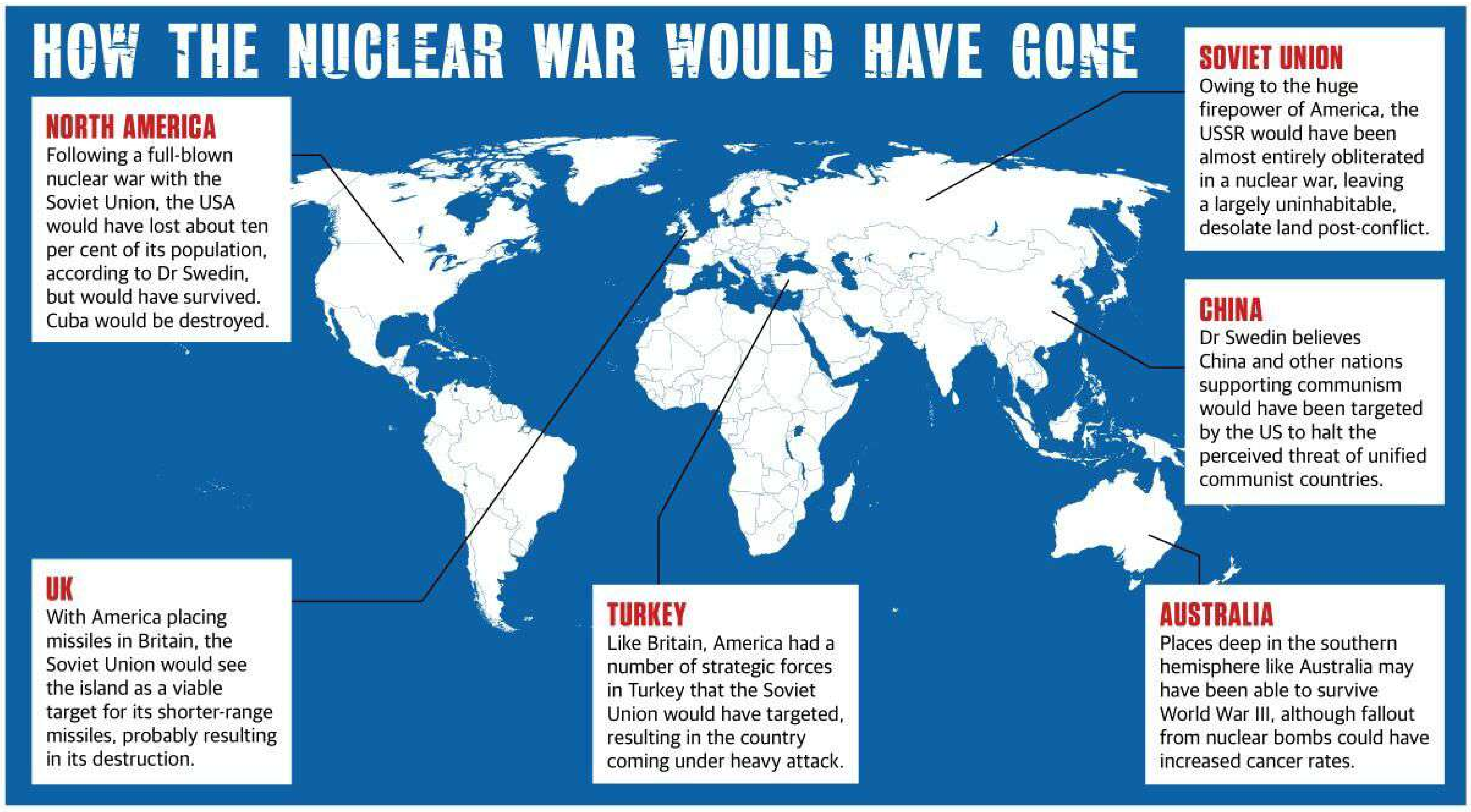
At that point the invasion [of Cuba] is defeated, the Americans are stunned, and that would have required a response from the US. There would also have been a substantial amount of uncertainty and fear about what the Soviets already had on the island, and I think that the US would have felt justified in using both tactical and strategic nuclear weapons and we can be fairly sure that they would have unfortunately obliterated Cuba.

**How would the war have played out?**

Soviet forces had about 100 tactical nukes, and I think that once [Cuba had been destroyed] the Soviet Union – in order [to save face] and maintain its international prestige – would have wanted to retaliate. They could have done this by taking Berlin with conventional forces, or they could have prepared to attack Europe or other places where there was tension. And this tit for tat – this unwillingness to be seen as compromising or backing down and trying to force the submission of the foe – would have been even more reckless.

People’s emotions quickly get caught up in these things; they don’t always make rational choices, and they don’t always back down even if that’s in their own best interests. [One such scenario could have been] that one of the Soviet light bombers dropped a bomb on New Orleans in Louisiana, where there was an infantry division embarking for the invasion of Cuba. With an American city destroyed at that point the world would sort of teeter [on the brink of war] and the Soviets would recognise very well that they were completely outgunned. Their number of strategic weapons was dramatically short compared to the Americans

## HOW THE NUCLEAR WAR WOULD HAVE GONE



**NORTH AMERICA**
Following a full-blown nuclear war with the Soviet Union, the USA would have lost about ten per cent of its population, according to Dr Swedin, but would have survived. Cuba would be destroyed.

**SOVIET UNION**
Owing to the huge firepower of America, the USSR would have been almost entirely obliterated in a nuclear war, leaving a largely uninhabitable, desolate land post-conflict.

**CHINA**
Dr Swedin believes China and other nations supporting communism would have been targeted by the US to halt the perceived threat of unified communist countries.

**UK**
With America placing missiles in Britain, the Soviet Union would see the island as a viable target for its shorter-range missiles, probably resulting in its destruction.

**TURKEY**
Like Britain, America had a number of strategic forces in Turkey that the Soviet Union would have targeted, resulting in the country coming under heavy attack.

**AUSTRALIA**
Places deep in the southern hemisphere like Australia may have been able to survive World War III, although fallout from nuclear bombs could have increased cancer rates.

and they would feel the need to go for it [all guns blazing], because otherwise they're not going to get in any blows if they don't attack immediately.

**How much of an advantage did the Americans have?**

The Soviets had 26 ICBMs [intercontinental ballistic missiles] – rockets that can be launched from the Soviet Union and hit the US – and they had none of their submarine-launched ballistic missiles at sea because all their submarines were in port; they were being worked on because they had problems with their nuclear reactors. And they had about 100 bombers that could reach the US. The US had 204 ICBMs, submarine-launched missiles at sea, almost 1,500 strategic bombers and they had enormous other forces. We're not even talking about something close to parity – we're talking about overwhelming power at that point because the Americans had been building up all through the 1950s driven by bad intelligence on how the Soviets had built up. Khrushchev before the Cuban Missile Crisis had wanted to spend money on the civilian economy, so he had been cutting the military budget. The Soviets reversed course after the Cuban Missile Crisis, though, spending a tremendous amount on strategic forces.

**Do you think it would have been a case of mutually assured destruction (MAD)?**

It sounds horrible, but certainly the Soviet Union would have been destroyed. And Europe would have been largely destroyed because the Soviets had a substantial number of ever-shorter range weapons that could have been used on Europe; it's just they didn't have a lot of weapons that could hit the USA.

I think the US could have been hit with enough weapons to kill maybe about ten per cent of the population, but I think it would have been survivable. This was before [the time] people started putting their ICBMs into deep silos, so most of the explosions would have been airbursts as opposed to ground-bursts. That would have dramatically reduced the amount of fallout.

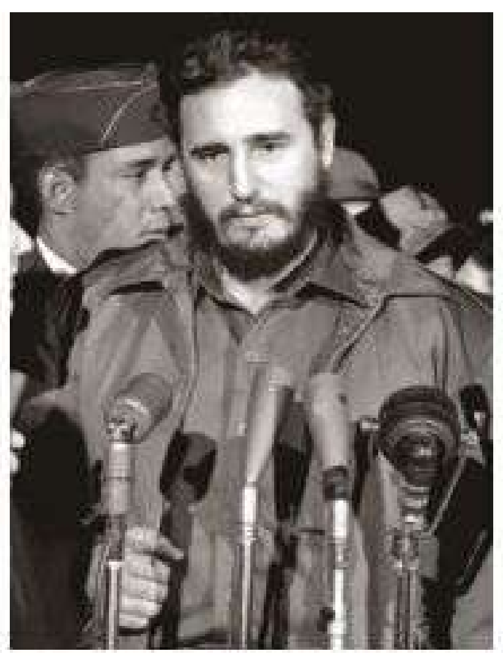
I think there were still substantial ecological consequences besides all the immediate destruction, but I don't think it would have been nuclear winter. Five years later, yes, it would have been because when you were trying to destroy the other country's missiles in the ground – when they're in deep silos – you're going to do ground-bursts to try and destroy them, not airbursts which the silos were designed to withstand.

People don't realise that there's a big difference between exploding a nuke in the atmosphere above a target and exploding it by letting it hit the ground. If you detonate it in the air, like over Hiroshima and Nagasaki [during World War II], you maximise your immediate blast effects, but you minimise your fallout. On the other hand, when you aim them at the ground you actually don't get as many blast effects except in the immediate area, but you maximise your fallout. And when I'm talking about minimise and maximise, we're talking about orders of thousands of percentage in magnitude between the two types [of explosion].

## HOW WOULD IT BE DIFFERENT?

### TIMELINE

1959



**Castro comes to power in Cuba**
Fidel Castro is sworn in as the prime minister of Cuba following the Cuban revolution and breaks ties with the US in favour of the Soviet Union.
**16 February 1959**

**Bay of Pigs invasion**
A counterrevolutionary military trained by the CIA to overthrow Castro fails in three days. In February 1962 the US announces an embargo on Cuba, which drives the communist nation to strengthen ties with the USSR.
**17 April 1961**

**Cuba armed with nuclear weapons**
The Soviet Union – partially in response to the US placing missiles in Turkey – begins building missile facilities in Cuba capable of launching nuclear weapons at the USA.
**August 1962**

**The US discovers weapons on Cuba**
After a U-2 spy plane flying over western Cuba finds missile sites, the US begins considering both diplomatic and military actions.
**14 October 1962**

**Naval blockade of Cuba**
Following consideration of an invasion, President Kennedy instead opts to 'quarantine' Cuba with a naval blockade to prevent any more Soviet ships from reaching the island.
**21 October 1962**

### REAL TIMELINE

### ALTERNATE TIMELINE

At the time, the Soviets didn't have many weapons that could have hit the US, but destruction of the USSR would have been assured

### Would Europe have got involved in the conflict – and would it have led to World War III?

I think it would have been World War III. We don't know exactly what the Soviet operating plan was, but we do know the US plan because parts of it have been declassified. The SIOP [Single Integrated Operational Plan] was [an outline] of what targets to hit during a general nuclear war.

The US would have attacked China because at that time they saw communism – even though it was changing – as a monolithic whole. Eastern Europe and other communist countries would have been hit for this reason too. And the plan did not allow for a lot of modifications; it was designed to maximise the efficiency and the use of the weapons, and assuming the Soviets had a similar plan they would have also tried to destroy American forces and US allies. One of the causes of the factors of the crisis was that there were shorter-range US Jupiter and Thor missiles in Turkey and Britain. So at the very least those would have been considered completely legitimate targets. In a general nuclear war Europe would not have been able to avoid being embroiled – officially as targets rather than acting participants striking back. It was just the nature of the time period.

> "One thing we almost certainly would never have seen was a man walk on the Moon, as that was driven by Cold War rivalry"

### What state would the world be in today?

I think you would have had substantial damage to the ozone layer and the northern hemisphere. You would have seen the complete collapse of the countries, societies and economies of all of Europe and the Soviet Union. I think the US would have survived, but I think they probably would have drawn inwards since their foes were gone. You may have seen the southern hemisphere flourish because there would have been a lot less fallout and effects down there.

One thing we almost certainly would never have seen was a man walk on the Moon, as that was very much driven by Cold War rivalry. With no such war the US would not have been spending its money on the Apollo project – it would have been spending money on trying to rebuild its country. The enormous loss of the population would have been dramatic too. Continuing effects from radiation would have caused higher cancer rates in the north and probably the south too.

### Could this situation ever happen again?

We always hope that things like this won't happen. Since the end of the Cold War both the Soviets [now the Russians] and the Americans have dramatically built down their strategic forces. They're no longer on trigger alert towards each other like they were during the Cold War.

I think the most likely scenario that we'd see today is the use of a dirty bomb, or a rogue nuke, or a smaller nuke, and I think it would be similar to 9/11 except on a dramatically vaster scale. That being said, I can also see India descending into war, and I can easily see Pakistan losing some of its weapons and those falling into the hands of non-state actors and being used. I personally expect in my lifetime to see another nuclear weapon used, and it's going to be a terrorist group or non-state actor setting it off.

**The US goes to DEFCON 2**
All Soviet ships en route to Cuba either slow down or reverse. The following day the US raises its military alertness to DEFCON 2, the highest level in American history.
**24 October 1962**

**Khrushchev's proposal**
Soviet Chairman Khrushchev sends a letter to President Kennedy proposing that Soviet missiles will be removed from Cuba if the US agrees never to invade the island.
**26 October 1962**

**The crisis ends**
Khrushchev convinces Kennedy that the U-2 shooting was not under his authority. Kennedy accepts and a deal is reached to withdraw Soviet weapons from Cuba, while the US agrees not to invade and withdraws its missiles from Turkey.
**28 October 1962**

**Invasion of Cuba**
The US decides on a militaristic approach. On this day they attempt another invasion of Cuba in order to seize the weapons on the island. The US military alertness is raised to DEFCON 1.
**25 October 1962**

**U-2 shot down**
An American U-2 plane is shot down over Cuba, under the lone authority of a Soviet commander on the island, and its pilot Major Rudolf Anderson is killed. Tensions between the US and Soviet Union strain and nuclear war seems inevitable.
**27 October 1962**

**Aftermath**
90 per cent of the US survives the nuclear war, but much of the rest of the northern hemisphere lies in ruins. Places deep in the southern hemisphere survive. Eventually, nuclear winter takes hold of large parts of the world, leaving it desolate and, in parts, uninhabitable.
**1963**

**Diplomatic negotiations cease**
As the world teeters on the brink of a third World War, any hopes of a diplomatic resolution between the US and Soviet Union are quashed
**24 October 1962**

**First nuclear missile launched**
The Soviet commander on Cuba, under his own authority, launches a tactical nuke against the US. America is stunned and immediately begins preparations for a nuclear war.
**26 October 1962**

**World War III begins**
The Soviet Union invades Berlin and fires upon targets in both the US and Europe, but the overwhelming firepower of the Americans makes the outcome of the war almost inevitable.
**November 1962**

**Obliteration**
The US strikes Cuba, the Soviet Union and other communist states with its full might. Ultimately, Cuba and the Soviet Union are obliterated, along with much of Europe as the USSR retaliates.
**December 1962**

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# PLOUGHING ITS OWN FURROW

Post-revolution Cuba has courted friendship where possible, but has never been afraid to strike out on its own

Written by
**DAVID SMITH**

Cuba has endured a tumultuous time in the decades since its successful revolution. Welcome periods of prosperity and optimism have been interspersed by intense doubt and the looming threat of economic collapse. The country was drawn deeper into the Soviet fold, only to see its main benefactor break apart under the weight of its own internal problems. It has attempted to export its revolution, providing advisors, armaments and even soldiers to revolutionary causes in Latin America and Africa. It has witnessed the ruthless stamping out of revolutionary governments elsewhere, serving as stark reminders of its own often precarious existence.

Throughout it all, the relationship with America has followed consistent themes. Both a blight on life in Cuba and a rallying point for its people, the continued hostility of the United States has been one of the few things Cubans have been able to depend on since they embarked on their revolutionary path. However, this familiar feature of the decades following the revolution appears to be finally changing.

## THE SUPERPOWERS

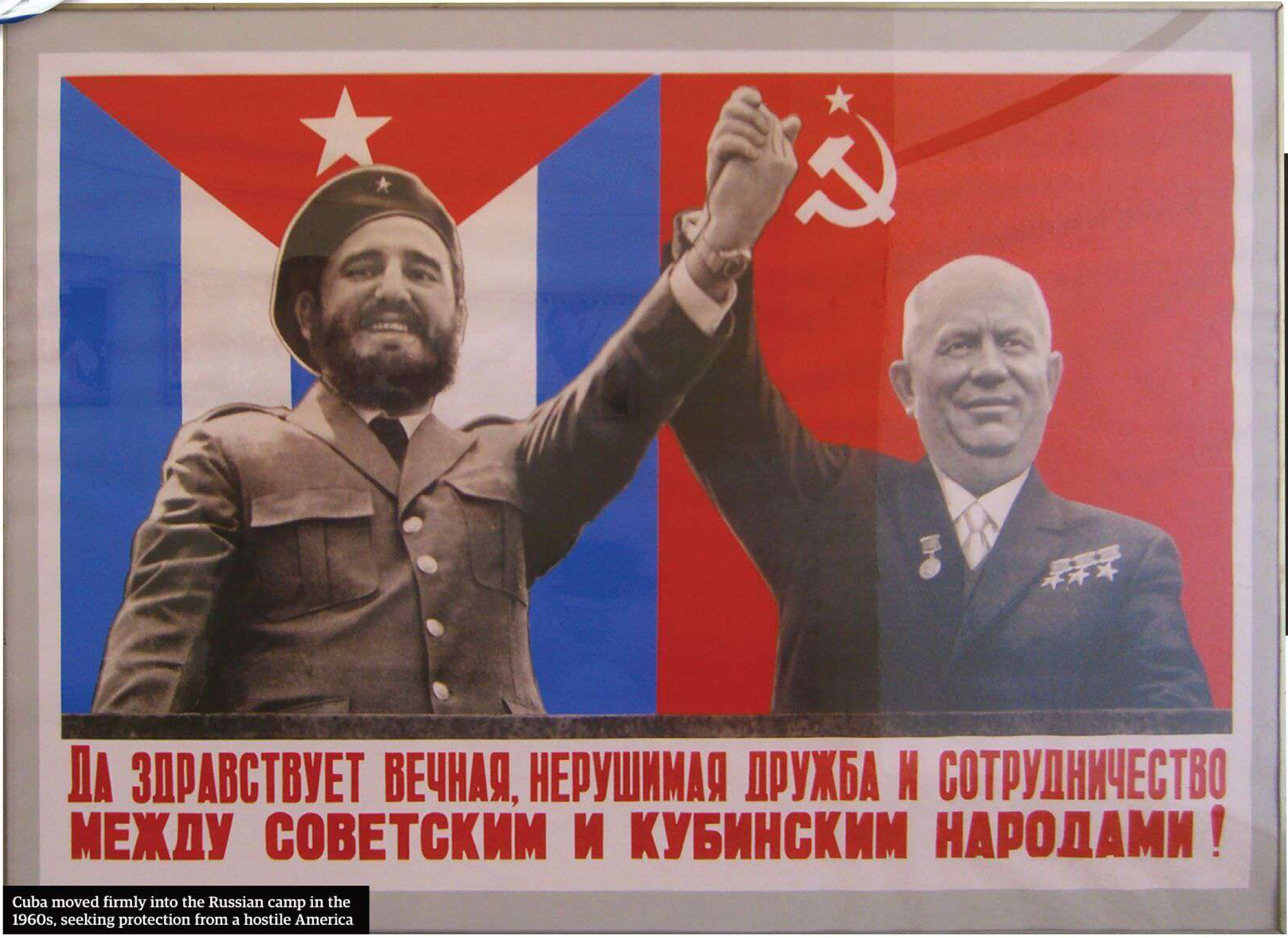
The Bay of Pigs invasion had shown Cuba how badly the Americans wanted their revolution to fail, while the missile crisis had seriously undermined Cuba's faith in the Russians. The country emerged from the twin events shaken and aware that it would need to tread carefully if it wasn't to be merely torn apart by the competing superpowers. However disillusioned the Cubans, and Castro in particular, were with the Russians, they remained the only viable survival strategy for the isolated nation. Fortunately, the Russians were eager to hold on to their ally in the Caribbean and Khrushchev launched a campaign to win back Castro's faith. The Cuban leader visited Moscow in April 1963 and stayed until June, touring the country and receiving a rapturous reception wherever he went.

During his visit, Castro became convinced that the move to diversify the economy had been a mistake. Sugar was returned to its throne as the centrepiece of the Cuban economy and production was to be increased. In turn, the Russians agreed to buy vast quantities of sugar at preferential rates. This would underpin the economy for more than two decades.

The Americans continued to expect a counter-revolutionary uprising in Cuba, and weren't afraid to try and bring one about. Operation Mongoose, set up in the aftermath of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, considered ways of bringing about Castro's downfall. Propaganda, sabotage and even assassination were all on the table when it came to Castro and Cuba, and the clandestine programme is believed to have run throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Cuba estimates the long-running US embargo has cost its economy more than $753 billion

Cuba's relationship with the Soviet Union would define the first three decades of its post-revolutionary existence


ДА ЗДРАВСТВУЕТ ВЕЧНАЯ, НЕРУШИМАЯ ДРУЖБА И СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО
МЕЖДУ СОВЕТСКИМ И КУБИНСКИМ НАРОДАМИ!

Cuba moved firmly into the Russian camp in the 1960s, seeking protection from a hostile America

## THE EMIGRANTS

Undermining hopes of an uprising against Castro's regime was the steady flow of exiles from Cuba. Thousands of the middle-class intelligentsia, some of whom had fought for Castro in the revolution but then become disillusioned by the turn towards socialism, left the country and made new homes in America. They believed their exile to be temporary, because Castro could surely not survive for long, but their emigration served to calm the situation in Cuba. In effect, they allowed what might have become a pressure cooker to let off a little steam. An estimated 40,000 people had left in the immediate aftermath of the revolution – a further 80,000 followed in 1961 and almost as many the next year. They set up homes in the established Cuban communities in America, most notably in Miami, where they patiently awaited Castro's fall. Many families, unable to afford to leave Cuba together, sent their children to America, in much the same way as Londoners had shipped their children to the countryside during the Blitz. 'Operation Pedro Pan' saw 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban children leave the country for America.

Castro, recognising that people would leave if they really wanted to, and also seeing the benefit in getting malcontents out of the country, announced in 1965 that such emigration would not be opposed. America had been able to portray the desperate attempts of people to leave Cuba by boat, many of which ended in tragedy, as the inevitable actions of an imprisoned population. This easy source of propaganda needed to be cut off.

The US's Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 was notable in signalling a return to dialogue between the two countries, and it also established a programme of 'Freedom Flights', which would last until 1971, when President Nixon cancelled them. By then the flights had cost the US around $50 million and had seen more than a quarter of a million Cubans emigrate. In all, an estimated one million Cubans left the country following the revolution, representing ten per cent of the national population.

In 1980, Arnaldo Tamayo Méndez became the first Cuban in space, lifting off on the Russian spacecraft Soyuz 38 after two years of training

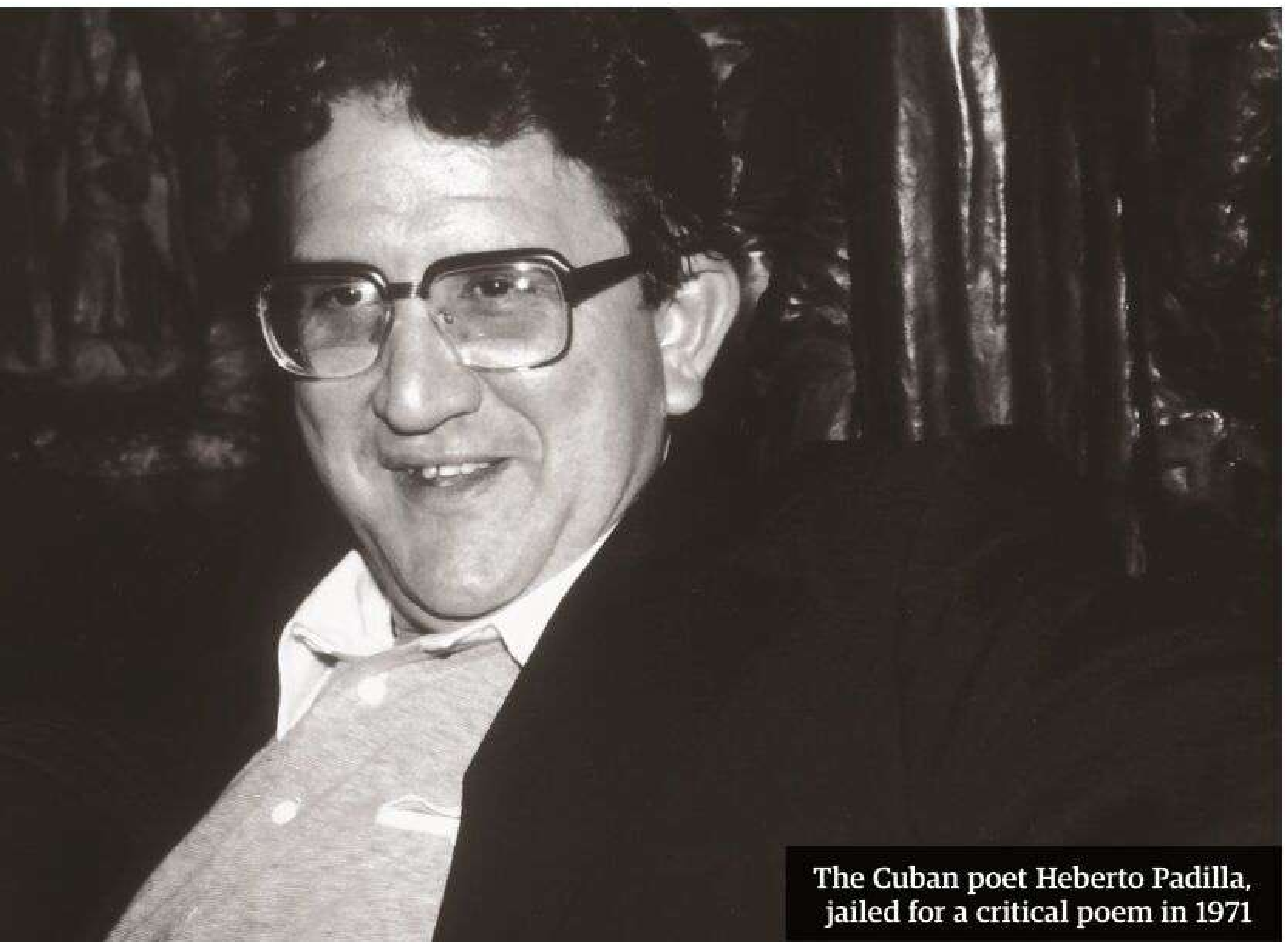
## EXPORTING THE REVOLUTION

The Cuban vision of revolutions throughout Latin America was pursued with determination. In his 'Second Declaration of Havana', a speech delivered in February 1962, Castro had claimed a continental revolutionary movement was beginning. "They are rising from the fields and mountains of America," he stated, "from the slopes of the sierras, from the plains and the forests… For this great humanity has cried 'Enough!' and has finally begun to move".

To keep them moving, Cuba offered military advisors, training and weapons. Financial support was limited and the provision of actual guerrilla fighters even more so. Cuba became involved in movements in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Panama, but usually on an unofficial basis. More overt support was offered in Argentina, where Castro hoped to foment a revolution, but this was a failure.

Cuba also saw the continent of Africa as a natural brother in the struggle against colonialism and Western imperialism. In 1965, Che Guevara took 100 Cubans to the Congo to join the rebels there. Cuba also handed over the weapons seized during the Bay of Pigs fiasco to grateful revolutionaries in Algeria, with Guevara embarking on a tour of African hotspots, taking in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique.

His report was disappointing. The African nations did not view themselves as part of a greater, international or even continental struggle, and there was no sense of unity between the revolutionaries in the various countries. A tiny

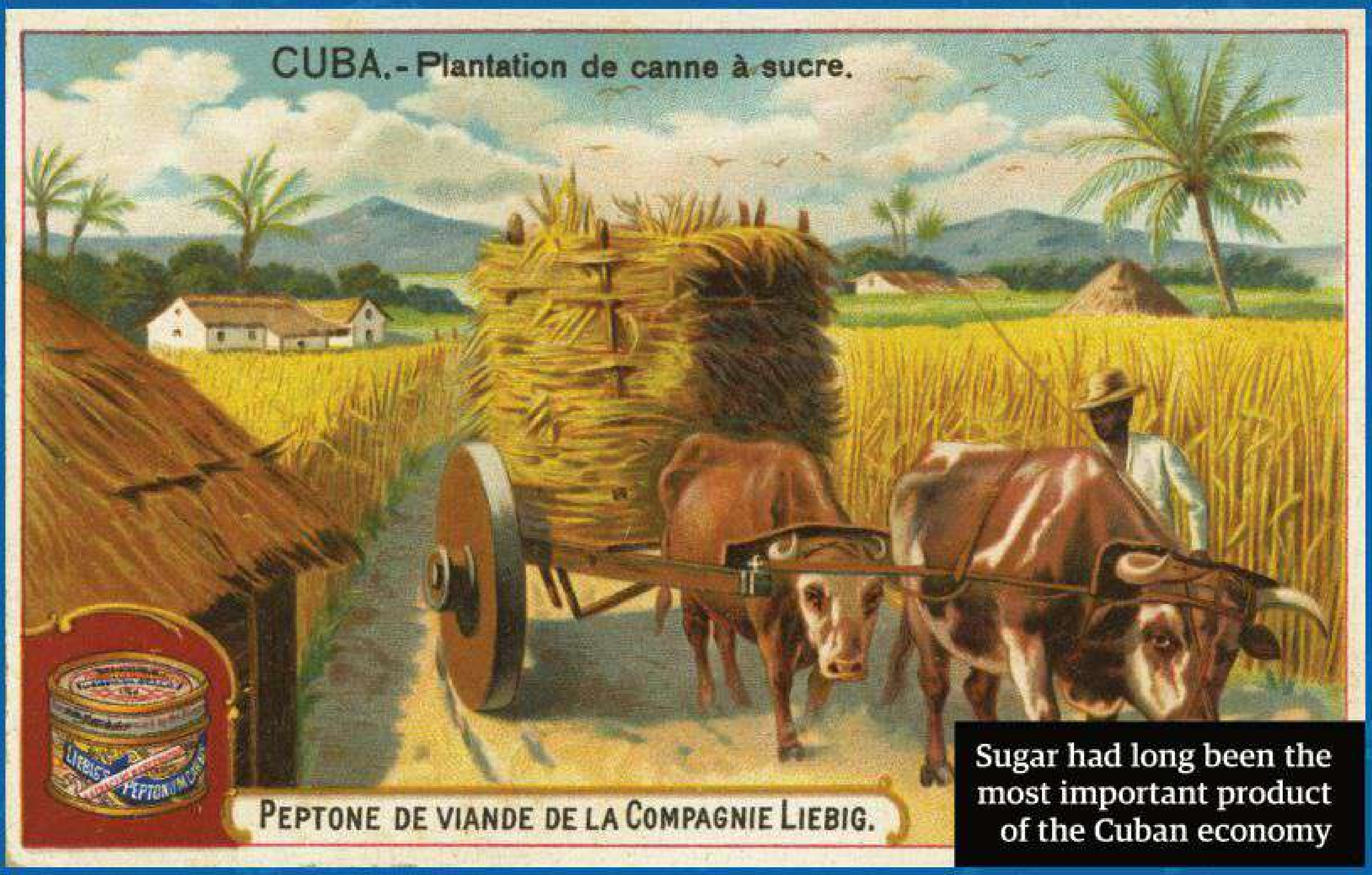


The Cuban poet Heberto Padilla, jailed for a critical poem in 1971

The spacesuit of Arnaldo Tamayo Méndez, the first Cuban in space

## THE 10 MILLION TON HARVEST

### After flirting with greater industrialisation, Cuba embraced sugar as the focal point of its economy in 1970



CUBA.- Plantation de canne à sucre.
PEPTONE DE VIANDE DE LA COMPAGNIE LIEBIG.

Sugar had long been the most important product of the Cuban economy

When Russia helped convince Castro to return sugar to its position of dominance in his country's economy, he took the message to heart. Sugar production was already substantial, with 3.7 million tons produced in 1969, but this was less than the five million tons Russia had committed to buy. Production needed to be boosted but Castro went even further, making an ambitious pledge. The following year, he promised, Cuba would produce an incredible ten million tons of sugar.

This triggered a remarkable effort, with the nation putting aside other concerns in an attempt to reach this lofty goal. Many doubted the possibility of such a monster crop and even the sugar minister, Oswaldo Borrego, believed it to be impossible. Castro was in no mood for naysayers and Borrego was fired.

The sugar minister was proved right, however, as production reached only 8.5 million tons. It was still a near-miraculous total, but given Castro's pledge it was a huge disappointment. The emphasis on sugar production had also negatively impacted on the rest of the economy as the entire nation had united behind the drive to produce more sugar.

The crop remained the most important element of the Cuban economy throughout the 1970s. Three-quarters of foreign income came via the export of sugar, with $1.2 billion flowing in during 1975 alone. The strategy made sense as long as Russia was willing to pay above-market rates for Cuban sugar. Inevitably, however, this was a situation that could not last forever.

number of guerrilla fighters was sent to the Congo, starting with just 14 and not getting much above 100 before they were withdrawn by the end of 1965. However, more serious intervention in Africa would come later.

### THE MOVE TO THE SOVIETS

In 1966, the Tricontinental Conference was held in Havana, at which Castro declared his belief in the unified nature of all revolutionary causes. By now, he was out of step with the Russians, who were working to bring about a more peaceful coexistence with America. Castro's desire for revolutions in places like Bolivia ran counter to Soviet wishes and the death of Guevara while leading a tiny band of guerrillas in that country helped convince Castro to change his tune. It was the end of the dream of a continental revolutionary movement and it also removed the last obstacle between Cuba and the Russians. Castro, perhaps with no real alternative, chose to embrace the Soviet way.

The result shocked his supporters, never more so than when he spoke in favour of the Russians' brutal crackdown in Czechoslovakia, in 1968. Earlier that year Castro had confiscated all private businesses in Cuba. The country was no longer trying out its own brand of communism – it was firmly in the Soviet camp. This extended to the running of the economy and in 1972 Cuba joined the communist organisation Comecon – the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.

By December of that year the Russians, now under Leonid Brezhnev, pledged to increase their support for Cuba over a 15-year period. Cuban debt would be temporarily put to one side, new lines of credit would be opened and industrialisation would be back on the agenda as the centrepiece of a Soviet-style five-year plan for the Cuban economy. Castro hailed this as "a model of truly fraternal, internationalist, and revolutionary relations," and it was the start of a golden era, known fondly in Cuba as the 'Brezhnev years'. Greater organisation and even a new constitution promised to usher in a new era, and the promise was kept, as economic growth was steady during the following decade.

The move towards the Soviet system did not please everyone, of course. Some intellectuals saw this as the loss of 'their' revolution and the substitution of Russia's. Unhappy with dissent, Castro warned artists that their work must remain 'within the Revolution'. In other words, criticism would not be tolerated and the point was underlined when the famous poet Heberto Padilla was arrested in 1971 and imprisoned for a month for a dissenting poem.

The 1970s also saw Cuba drawn further into conflicts in Africa. Seeing the continent as a more promising place to support revolutionary movements, as opposed to the more entrenched situation in Latin America, Castro remained fascinated by Africa's potential. He believed that African nations could be quickly transformed into socialist states after imperialist powers had been kicked out and he showed a willingness to support any revolutionary movement, with increasing levels of commitment.

In Ethiopia, Cuba sent around 24,000 troops to fight US-backed Somali invaders and Cuba also became heavily involved in Angola. By repeatedly aligning themselves against American interests, however, the Cubans undermined chances of a reconciliation with the States. The presidency of Jimmy Carter promised, briefly, to change all that.

# INTERVENTION IN ANGOLA

## After tentative involvement in Africa in the 1960s, Cuba dived headfirst into Angola in 1975

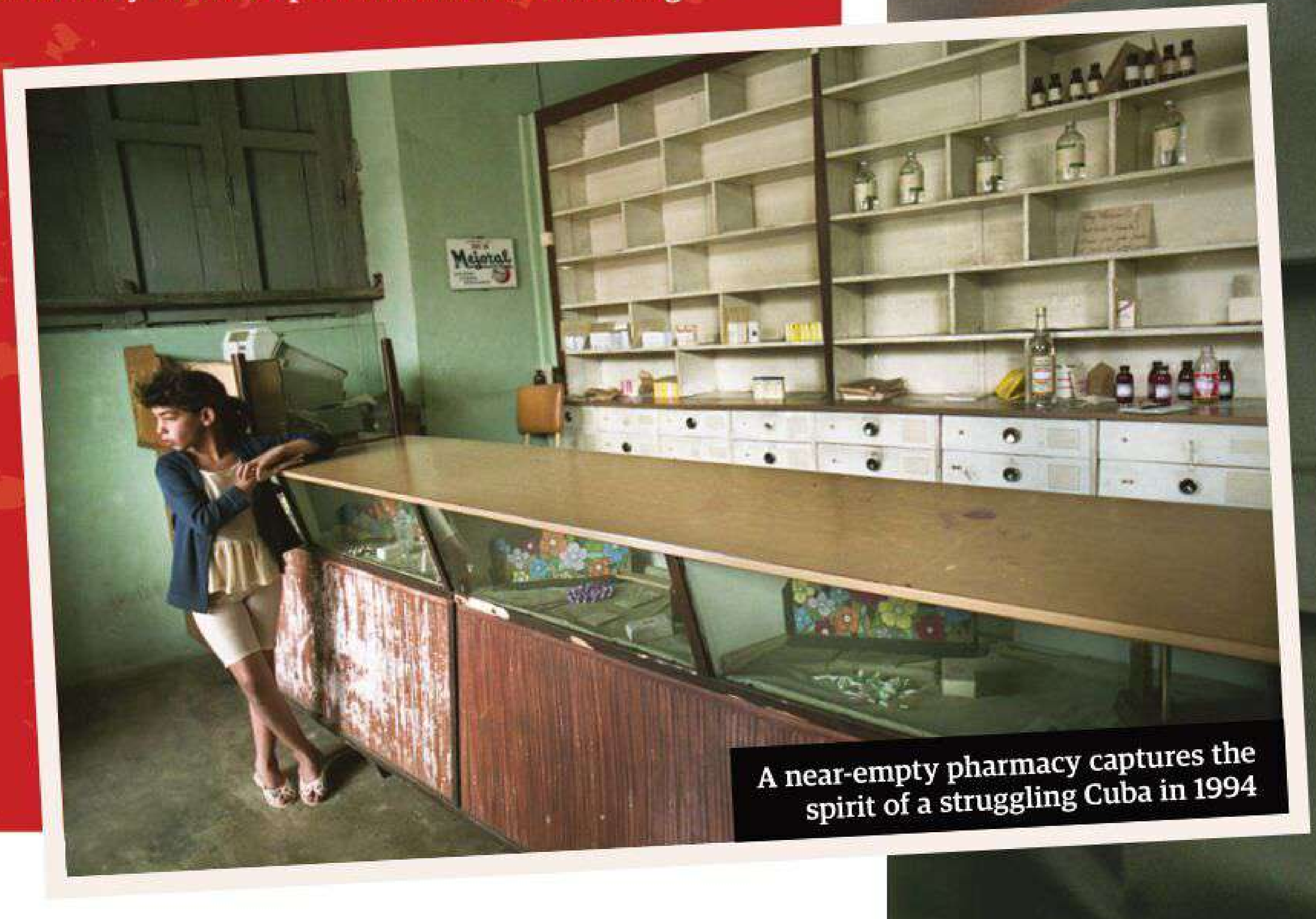
Cuban soldiers stand alongside comrades of the MPLA in 1988

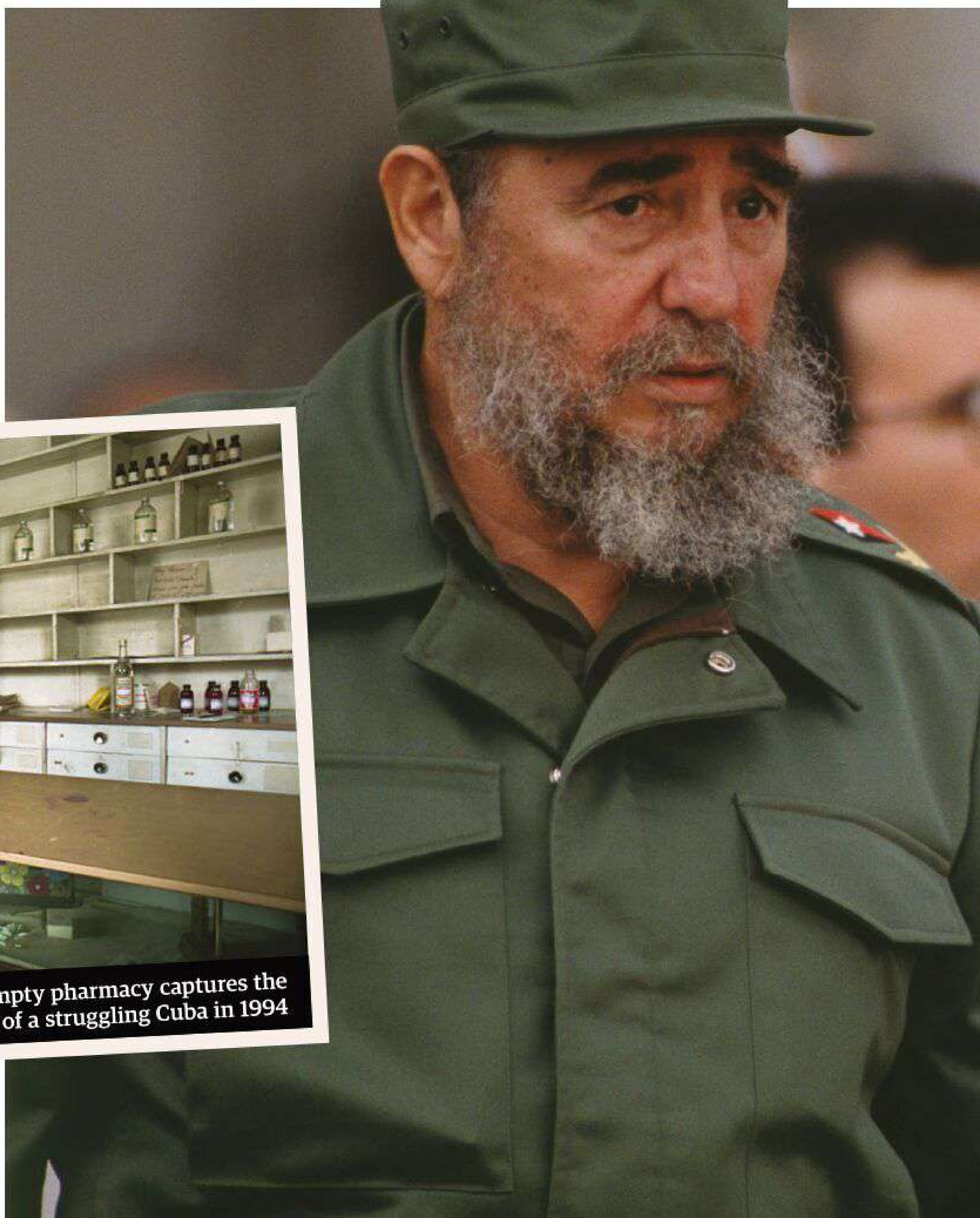
Cuba found itself engaged once more in Africa in 1975, but on an entirely different scale to its previous involvement. Rival independence movements in Angola had made the situation complicated and precarious as Portugal disengaged from the country. The MPLA attracted support from the Soviets and Cuba, while the FNLA was backed by China and the CIA, and UNITA drew support from South Africa.

Into this potentially chaotic situation Castro threw his assistance, without any consultation with his most important friends, the Soviets. Agostinho Neto, leading the MPLA, requested Cuban assistance in 1974 and it started to arrive the following year as civil war tore the country apart.

Initially sending military advisors to train troops, Cuba soon realised they would not train men quickly enough to stave off defeat for the MPLA. 'Operation Carlota' was initiated, with limited numbers of Cuban special forces troops leading the way. By the end of 1975, Cuba had committed 4,000 regular soldiers to Angola. The intervention by Cuba helped halt a force marching on the MPLA's base in Luanda, made up mainly of FNLA guerrillas, although South African Defence Force units were also part of the column.

Cuba had turned the tide of the war and saved the MPLA, earning huge prestige in Angola and the rest of the continent. Castro was not about to cut and run, either. Promising to keep forces in Angola as long as they were needed, Cuba retained a military presence there for 15 years.


A near-empty pharmacy captures the spirit of a struggling Cuba in 1994



## A CHANCE AT PEACE

American businesses wanted an end to the trade embargo with Cuba and with a new president came a new outlook. Embassies in each country were reopened, although they were termed, rather awkwardly, 'interests' sections'. The exile problem had taken a sinister turn, with terrorist actions now perpetrated by Cuban organisations in Miami, including the bombing of a plane in October 1976, in which the Cuban national fencing team was killed.

Castro worked to improve relationships with the exile community, freeing prisoners and softening rules on travelling to Cuba, which enabled exiles to visit families left behind. He also allowed exiles to send money to their relatives in Cuba. This became a useful source of hard currency for some but did also create a two-tier society in Cuba, separating those who had wealthy relatives in America from those who did not.

The visits of Cuban exiles also helped to unsettle sections of the population, who were able to hear in detail how life in America differed from that in Cuba. A second wave of emigration was triggered, the so-called Mariel boatlift of 1980, in which a further 125,000 Cubans left the country in search of greener pastures.

> In keeping with its anti-imperialistic stance, Cuba spoke out in favour of Argentina during the 1982 Falklands crisis

The hopes of a new relationship with America faded as Carter failed to win a second term in office. Intransigence on both sides also played a part, with each insisting on reparations for the economic damage inflicted by the other. Revolutions in Nicaragua and Grenada in 1979 had been supported by Cuba, but the United States would ultimately force them both to collapse, supporting the Contra counter-revolutionaries in Nicaragua and directly invading Grenada. These were worrying examples of just how far America was willing to go in order to stamp out left-wing revolutions, and clear warnings to Cuba, but even more worrying events were on the way.

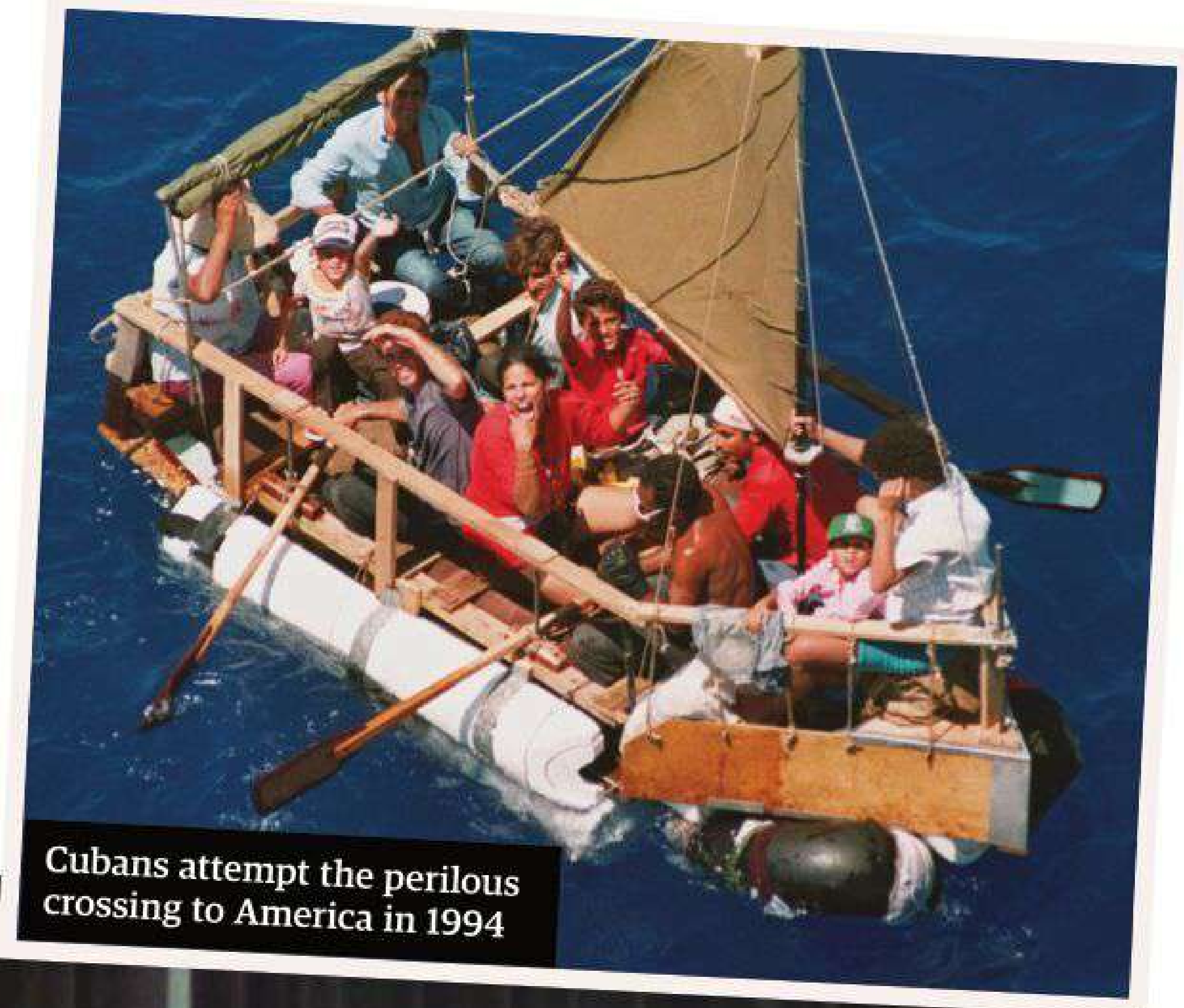
## THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION

While a change of presidents in America had briefly promised hope, a change of leadership in the Soviet Union brought uncertainty. Under the reformist Mikhail Gorbachev, some unpalatable truths were spelled out. Gorbachev favoured improved relations with America and he explained to Castro that Russia's defence guarantee to Cuba could no longer be upheld. In reality it had long been unrealistic, but having it spelled out was a blow to the nation's confidence and security.

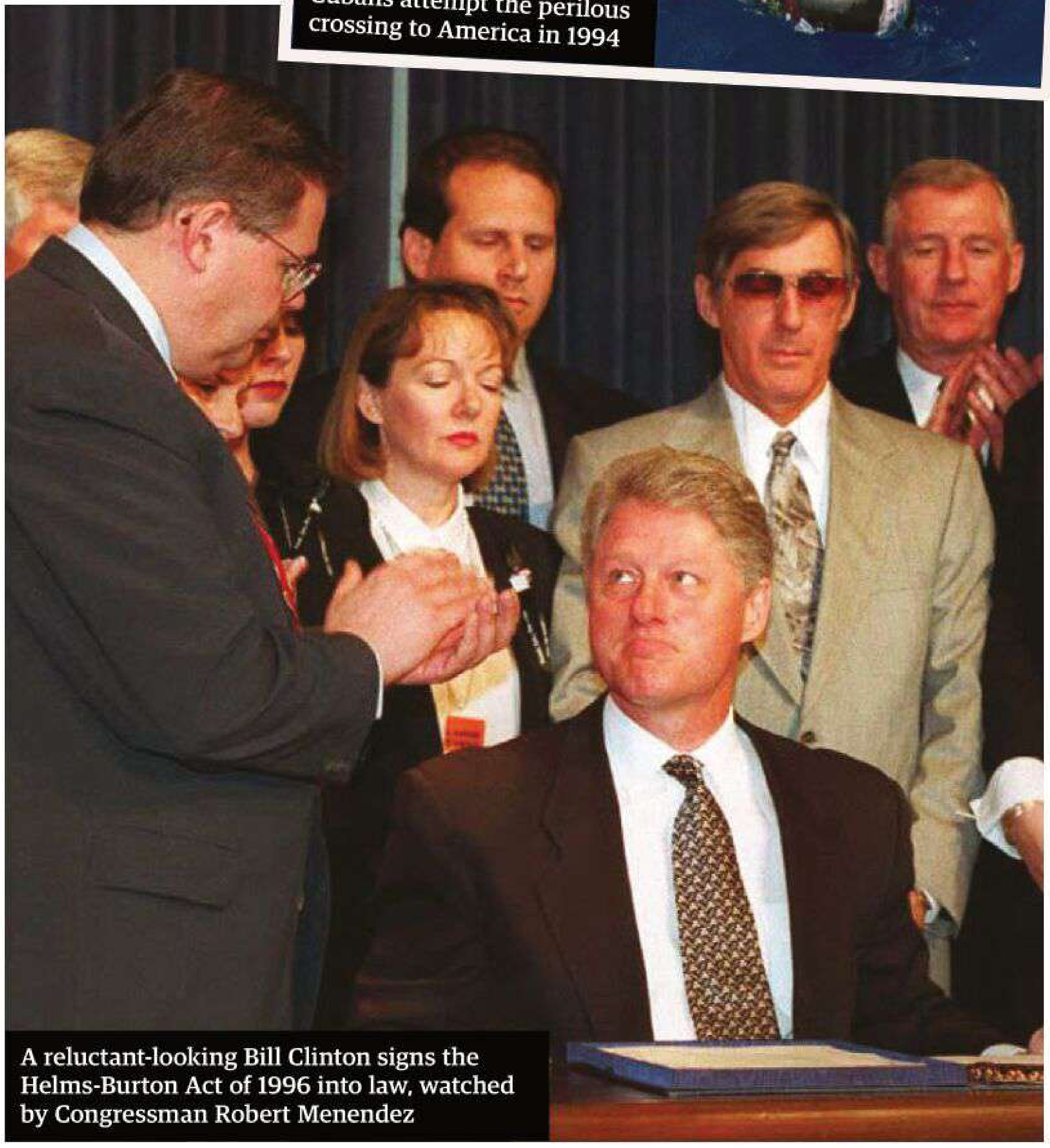
During a meeting in 1989, however, things got even worse. Gorbachev now revealed that Russia would have to end its preferential rates for sugar purchases and Cuba would in future need to pay for Russian goods in dollars. With the Cuban economy already running into difficulties (the price of sugar had dropped sharply on the world markets), this was a hammer blow.

A shaken Castro mused on the possibility that the Soviet Union might actually fall apart, but he was probably surprised at how quickly his musings proved prophetic. The year was full of bad omens for the Cubans - the Americans invaded Panama, the Berlin Wall fell and President Ortega in Nicaragua was defeated in elections. In 1991, a coup against Gorbachev in Moscow failed, but the Soviet Union did indeed collapse and 7,000 Soviet troops based in Cuba were withdrawn.

Oil supplies from Russia were drying up and the Cuban economy was on the verge of collapse. In fact, the country was moving backwards. Oxen


Cubans attempt the perilous crossing to America in 1994

A pensive Fidel Castro with the reformist Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev


A reluctant-looking Bill Clinton signs the Helms-Burton Act of 1996 into law, watched by Congressman Robert Menendez

were replacing farm machinery and bicycles were replacing cars. Cuba became one of the poorest nations in the world and Castro was widely expected to fall by the end of 1991.

## THE SPECIAL PERIOD

Despite the economy melting down (GDP fell by 15 per cent in 1993), Castro somehow hung on. Calling the situation "a special period in time of peace", he introduced an austerity programme, with rationing brought in for both food and clothing. Food production needed to be boosted as the country sat on the brink of starvation and people were urged to work in the fields.

More radical changes were also needed. Though he still railed against the evils of capitalism, Castro made concessions to the state of his country. Entrepreneurs were to be tolerated once more, with people now allowed to start up their own businesses. Foreign investment was welcomed and the US dollar was adopted as the country's official currency for trade and services, relegating the peso to domestic duties. It was humiliating, but there was already a thriving, dollar-driven black market set up in Cuba.

Perhaps most symbolically, state farms were broken up and cooperatives allowed to run the agricultural economy. The question was, would these changes be enough to save the country? The signs were not good when a third wave of emigration was triggered following riots in Havana in 1994. The economy, however, was starting to turn around and there was once more reason to hope for improved relations with America. Cuba's days as an interventionist power were over (in 1992 Castro had declared that "military assistance outside our borders is a thing of the past") and the strong link with the Russians was gone.

However, America chose to ratchet up the pressure on Cuba rather than look for a thaw in relations. Partly this was due to the emerging Cuban-American lobby in the States, which consistently pushed for tougher action against Castro. With politicians like Robert Menendez, born in America just months after his family had fled Cuba, being elected to Congress and then the Senate, there were strong voices arguing against improved relations with Cuba.

Economic pressure was increased with the Torricelli Act of 1992 and the Helms-Burton Act of 1996, the latter of which effectively claimed the right of America to dictate the type of democracy Cuba should operate. European nations reacted with distaste to the bills, seeing no reason to continue persecution of Cuba now the Soviet bogeyman had disappeared from the scene.

## NEW HORIZONS

Cuba made it to a new century and a new millennium, although fittingly enough for a people that marched to the beat of their own drum, they celebrated the new millennium in January 2001. Castro no doubt took pleasure in being correct despite the rest of the world disagreeing with him.

Aside from this show of stubbornness, Cuba was changing. A younger generation was coming into power, partly as a simple result of the passing years but partly as a deliberate policy. Denying the young a say in the running of the country was a recipe for counter-revolution.

> The Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 was amended in 1996 to grant the right of asylum to any Cuban who set foot on American soil

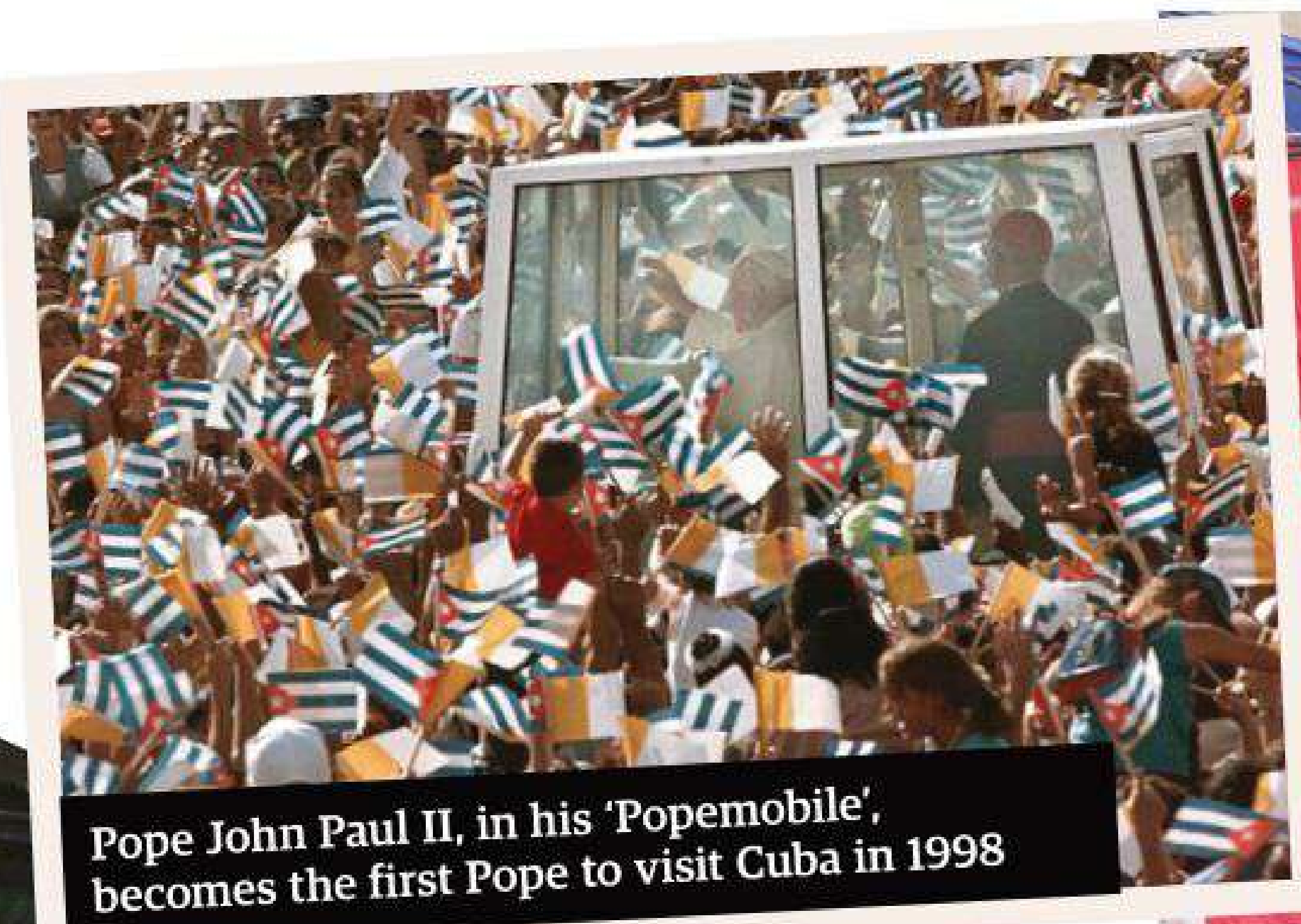
Remarkably, the Cuban Revolution had not collapsed, nor had it 'eaten its young' as so many others had done. Even more remarkable was the country's resilience in the face of overt hostility from the most powerful nation on the planet, even after losing its most important benefactor and protector in 1991.

Castro declared the "special period in time of peace", with its accompanying austerity measures, to be over in 2005. Having established better relations with China, Cuba was also benefitting from improved ties with Latin America, where Venezuela and Brazil were becoming important sources of support. A 2000 deal to exchange trained Cuban medical staff for Venezuelan oil was particularly significant.

Castro proved he was not immortal in 2006, when ill-health forced him to temporarily step down from power. The move became permanent in 2008 and his brother Raúl took over the reins of the nation. Castro survived another eight years, finally passing away on 25 November 2016. Whatever people thought of him, none could deny the impact he had made on his world. Barack Obama commented: "History will record and judge the enormous impact of this singular figure on the people and world around him".

The revolution Castro led had defied the experts by simply surviving, but it had also forged a country with a sense of pride and a strong identity. America's attempts to crush it had served to give the people a unifying enemy, even in the darkest times of economic strife. Having survived with few friends and having been willing to help revolutionary causes wherever they sprang up, Cuba now finds itself as part of an organisation working towards greater cooperation between the nations of Latin America. ALBA, originally known

Castro and Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez, in 2000, on the verge of their historic deal


Pope John Paul II, in his 'Popemobile', becomes the first Pope to visit Cuba in 1998

Tourism has become one of the most important industries in Cuba, with 4.5 million visitors in 2017

# A PRESIDENTIAL VISIT

## The visit of the US president to Cuba promised to herald a new era in the nations' troubled relationship

On 20 March 2016, Barack Obama became the first US president to visit Cuba since Calvin Coolidge in 1928. In characteristic style he tweeted as he landed, "¿Que bolá Cuba?", asking the nation he was visiting, 'what's up?'.

"This is a historic visit," Obama said after arriving. "It's a historic opportunity to engage with the Cuban people."

Obama's visit came after he had removed Cuba from America's list of state sponsors of terrorism the previous year and moved to 'normalise' relations between the two countries. The Cuban Embassy, operating under the name of the 'Cuban Interests' section and officially part of the Swiss embassy in Washington, DC, was formally restored to its full title in 2015.

Secret talks between Cuba and the US had taken place in Canada in 2013 and at the end of that year Obama had shaken hands with then Cuban president, Raúl Castro.

The influence of the Pope was also a key factor in the thaw. Pope John Paul II had visited Cuba in 1998, helping to improve relations between the communist country and the Catholic Church, but it was a new pontiff, Pope Francis, who reached out to Obama in 2014 in an attempt to help Cuba.

**Rain cannot dampen the spirits as Barack Obama meets the Cuban people**

as the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America, and named after the 19th century revolutionary Simón Bolívar, was formed by Cuba and Venezuela in 2004. The organisation now includes Bolivia, Nicaragua and several Caribbean nations and the bloc uses a common currency called the 'Sucre'.

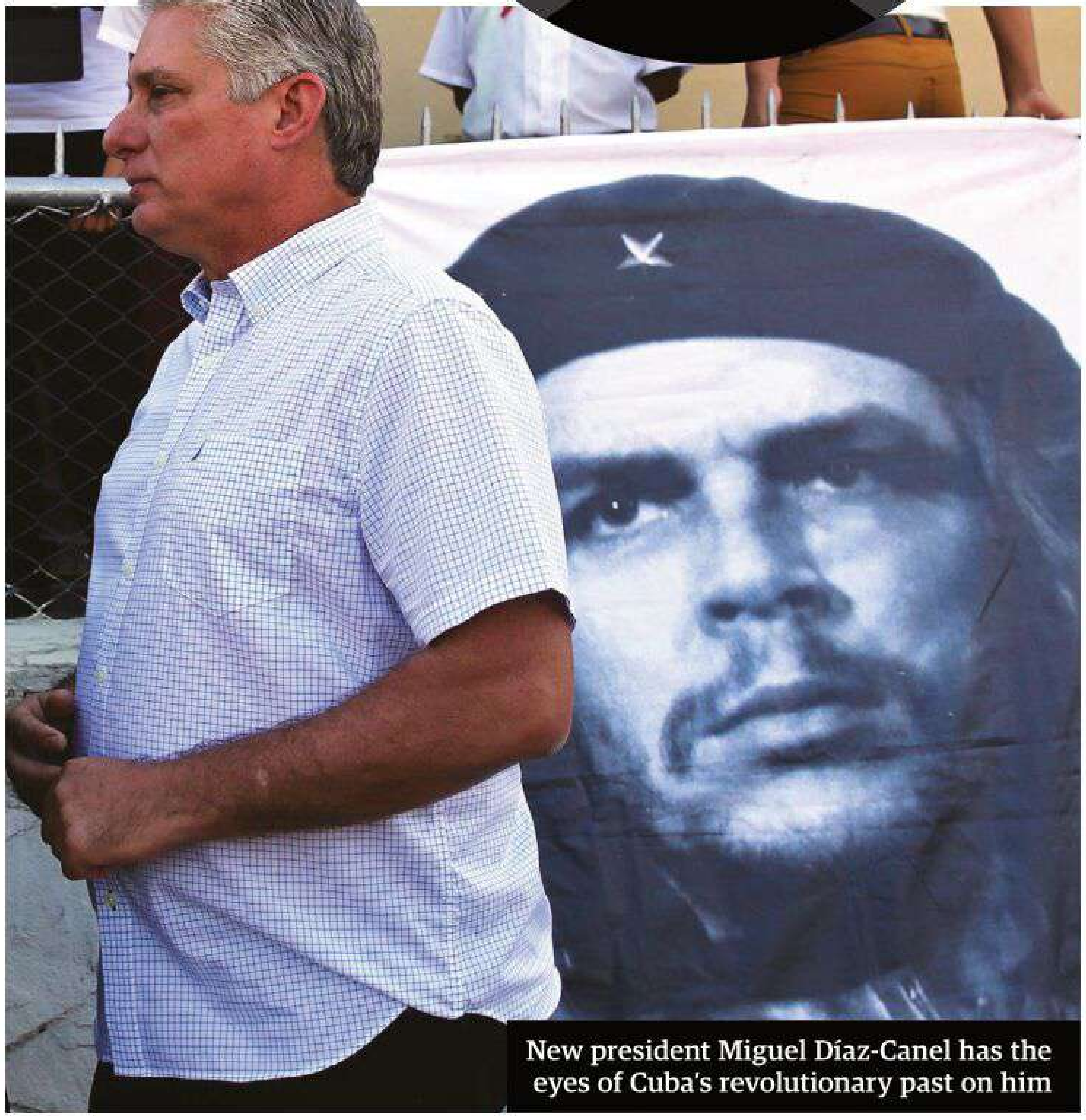
Good relations have also been maintained with the nations of Africa. During a 2008 UN vote on the continuing US embargo, all 53 African nations supported Cuba. The EU removed diplomatic sanctions against Cuba in the same year.

Relations between Cuba and America thawed under Obama, and even a little backtracking under Donald Trump has not removed hope the embargo will one day be lifted. Under a new president (Raúl Castro stepped down in April 2018 and was replaced by Miguel Díaz-Canel) Cuba is looking forward to a future few would have thought possible during the hectic, exhilarating days of its revolution.

> Cuba observed nine days of national mourning after the death of Fidel Castro

FIDEL ES Revolución

**A soldier salutes as the body of Fidel Castro is driven by during the state funeral of the former Cuban leader**



**New president Miguel Díaz-Canel has the eyes of Cuba's revolutionary past on him**

© Getty Images

Armed rebels gather in support of the revolution in front of the Presidential Palace in Havana in 1959. Today the building is home to the Museum of the Revolution. Among its exhibits is the Granma, the boat which carried Che Guevara, Fidel Castro and 80 other rebels from Mexico to Cuba in 1956 to begin the revolution.

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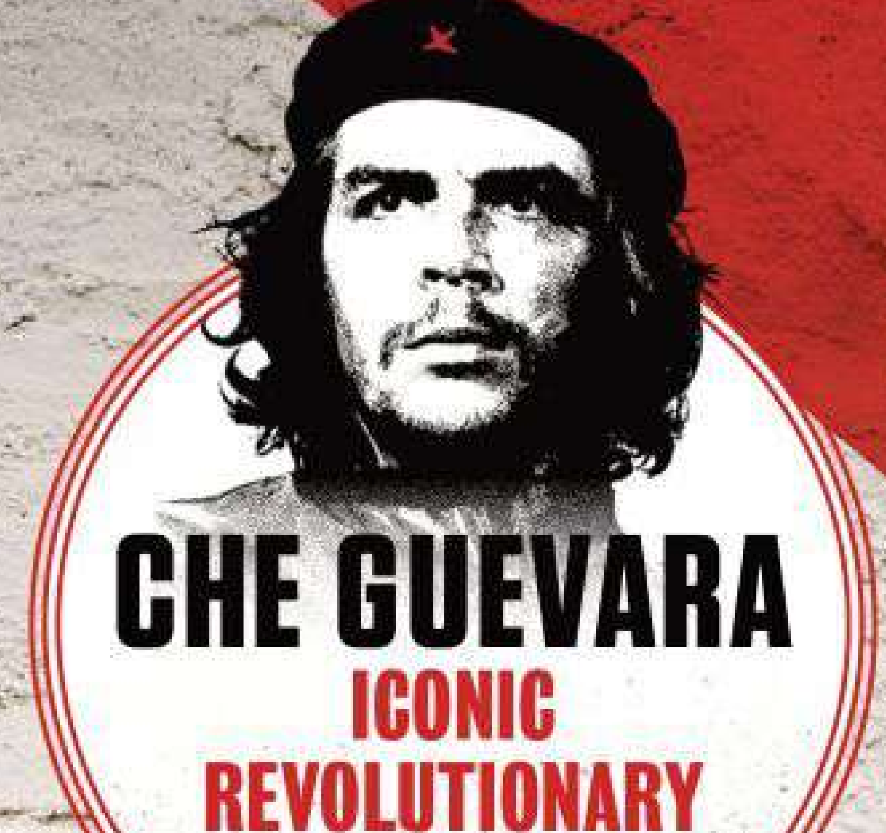


**CHE GUEVARA**
**ICONIC REVOLUTIONARY OR MURDERER?**

# CUBAN REVOLUTION

## THE TRUE STORY OF THE REVOLUTION THAT SHOOK THE WORLD

*Road to revolution*

*The early history of Cuba*

THE EARLY HISTORY OF CUBA

Conquered by Spain and absorbed into a mighty empire, Cuba would rail under the yoke of imperialism for almost 400 years

### ROAD TO REVOLUTION

How Cuba's early history helped sow the seeds of revolution on the island nation

*Viva la revolución*

*Rebels triumphant: The final victory*

REBELS TRIUMPHANT: THE FINAL VICTORY

A series of stunning victories against government forces compelled dictator Fulgencio Batista to flee Cuba ahead of Fidel Castro's rebel army

The United States initially recognised Castro's government in Cuba but withdrew its support in the coming months

### VIVA LA REVOLUCIÓN

The key events of the revolution, from the failed attack at Moncada to the guerrilla war

*Post-revolution Cuba*

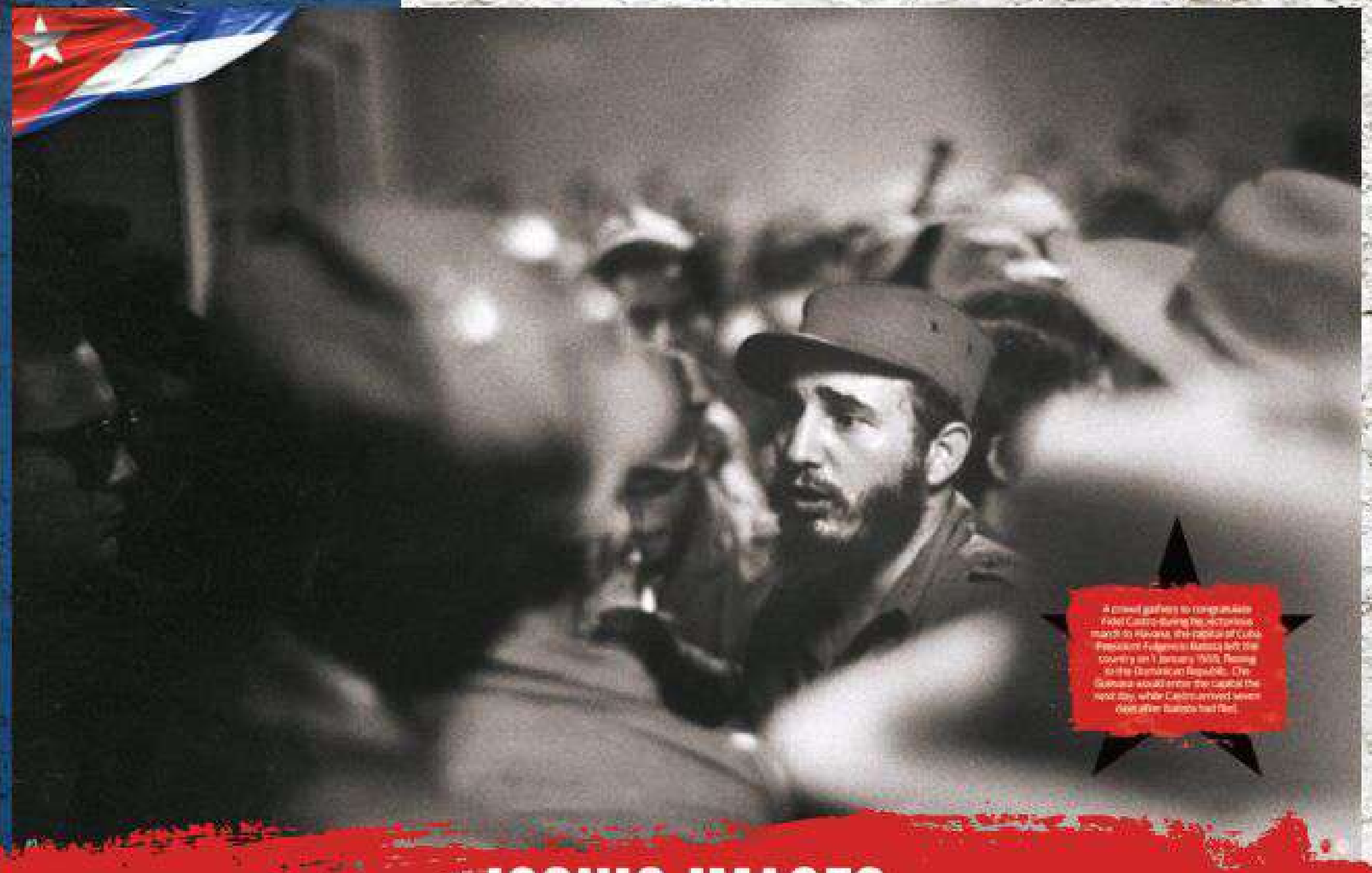
*Ploughing its own furrow*

PLOUGHING ITS OWN FURROW

Post-revolution Cuba has courted friendship where possible, but has never been afraid to strike out on its own

### POST-REVOLUTION CUBA

How Castro's revolution shaped Cuba and the world in the decades that followed



### ICONIC IMAGES

Fascinating behind-the-scenes imagery of key figures and moments during the conflict

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